TORTURED

THE SAM ENGLISH STORY

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One

IF EVER one could choose their birthplace, the tranquillity, beauty and lush, rolling hills of Crevolea would be an excellent place to start. The slow pace of life and natural splendour entranced both Richard English and his wife, Jane Milliken, just like their parents before them, so it was no great surprise when they chose to raise their family in the small townland they called home.

Crevolea is one of more than 60 such townlands in the parish of Aghadowey, which is situated in the vast county of Londonderry, in the north of Ireland, just slightly east of centre. The town closest to Crevolea is Coleraine, just eight miles to the north, while the village of Garvagh is less than five miles away in the opposite direction.

The birthplace of Sam English takes in an area of around half a mile and has just a single street. You can hear a pin drop as you walk along the narrow, but deserted pavements in the picture-postcard hamlet. Time has stood still in Crevolea, where a couple of dozen houses are protected from the outside world by rows of carefully planted trees, standing guard jealously in perfect formation, just 40 minutes – but a world away – from the nearby city of Londonderry.

Our story starts a few hundred yards from the main Drumcroon Road on the morning of Saturday, 8 August 1908, when Richard and Jane English introduced Samuel as their tenth child. When the fair-haired baby was settling down to life in the brood, he had nine sets of sibling eyes trained upon his tiny frame, as well as those of his proud parents. William, who was 18, Robert (17), James (15), Bessie (13), Annie (11), Ellen (eight), David (six), Jane (four) and Richard (16 months) were more than happy to welcome this new life into the family. One more child, Mary, would come along a little more than four years later, once the family had moved away from Crevolea. Only then would there be enough children to complete Richard's very own football team! So how appropriate that young Samuel was born on a Saturday.

For now, though, home was Crevolea, a Presbyterian stronghold where all but one of the 62 residents practised this faith. In fact, in 1908, the vast majority – around 90 per cent – of those living in the northern part of the country were Presbyterian.

Life in Crevolea, while undertaken at a slower pace than any of the main towns or ports in the north of Ireland, was still tough, and it was becoming increasingly harder for Richard to eke out a living on his small farm and provide for his burgeoning family.

Although born in the United States, Richard came from strong Aghadowey stock. His mother and father, James English and Elizabeth Gresham, had married in 1865 in Aghadowey Parish Church, and left shortly after the wedding to start a new life in America, as James had family there. The American Civil War hadn't long ended, and even though the effects of the four-year conflict were still being felt from north to south, the English family pressed on with their plans. Richard was born in 1867, and his father had still hoped to make a go of it in the new world, but Elizabeth longed for home and so the family made the decision

to return to their roots and re-settle in Ireland, where they would raise their children in Aghadowey.

After meeting and marrying local lass Jane Milliken, Richard had taken on the smallholding at number nine Crevolea Road, which was situated just a few hundred yards from the main street. The three bedrooms in the pretty grey-brick house with low-slung thatched roof provided adequate accommodation for the family, and was one of just 11 dwellings in Crevolea. There were three windows to the front of the house, which meant stunning views of the sweeping countryside, which extended as far as the eye could see.

Richard's land included space for six outbuildings and, at the time, was the perfect place to bring up a large family with young children. The popular farmer kept cows and pigs and was helped with day-to-day chores by his brother, David, who lived close by at number 11. Their sister, Elizabeth, also lived at number 11, which was rented from the landholder.

But his main source of income, like many contemporary Irish farmers, was through the production of flax fibre, which was grown on the farm and then scutched, to separate the impurities from the raw material, such as straw and woody stem. Once scutched, the fibre would be bunched together – hence the saying 'flaxen hair' – and sold to agents. It was stronger than cotton fabric, but less pliable, and while the best grades were used for lace and damask, coarser cuts would generally be kept by the farmer and used to produce twine and rope. The linen industry was important to the Irish economy during the 18th and 19th centuries, and following the scutching process, many families would be employed by the agents to spin the flax into yarn, or bleach the linen. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, bleaching greens were a popular sight in Aghadowey.

Irish linen was world renowned, but while an abundance of flax had been growing in the country since the 11th century, by

the end of the 1800s, countries in the north of Europe, such as Belgium and the Netherlands, had become the main centres of flax and linen, and as a consequence most of the trade in Ireland was lost to these countries.

Richard worked long hours to provide for his growing family, but as the focus of the flak trade shifted east, he was finding it increasingly difficult to make ends meet, and one spring evening, sat down with wife Jane to discuss their future. The majority of the children were fast asleep when their worried parents eventually came to a tough decision. They would leave behind the solitude of Crevolea in order to find the type of employment that would put food on the table and also provide a whole range of future opportunities for their children.

Richard and Jane realised that their children were growing up fast and that there wasn't sufficient job opportunities locally to satisfy everyone. The couple spoke of moving elsewhere within Ireland, but in the end somewhat reluctantly decided to let out the farm and head off to try their luck in Canada. It was a speculative and bold decision but one that was taken with their children foremost in their minds. No more would they open their front door to reveal some of the lushest grassy fields north of Belfast. The house, set back from the small through road which was just 15 yards from their front door, had been a good home to the English family for more than a decade, but it was time for a change and they began to make arrangements for their impending move across the Atlantic.

It was February 1910, and even though there was little interest in their property at first, they would sit it out and wait a few months before making any final decisions. Sadly, though, their plans were hampered by a general lack of interest in the farm, and without a tenant in place they were forced to abandon the notion of Canada in the short term. They resurrected the idea a

few months later, although this time decided to put the farm up for sale.

But during the period between the English family putting their house on the market, and actually finding a buyer, Richard had been speaking to friends with family members who had made the move to Scotland, mostly to Greenock, and found employment. It wasn't nearly as far as Canada and there was the possibility of semi-regular trips home to consider. This curveball was a serious contender, so Richard and Jane gave their new option due consideration. Meanwhile, Richard learned of possible job opportunities at the growing John Brown shipyard, in the Clydebank area of Glasgow. It had become one of the most famous in the world through building and launching the likes of the RMS *Lusitania*, and he was tipped off that they were recruiting all manner of employees. The company had established a works in Coventry, and bought a stake in a Spanish naval yard, but it was the expansion to cover 80 acres at its Clydebank base which piqued his curiosity. It was boom time on the River Clyde; the ideal time, in fact, to make the move.

The sale of the farm was set for Monday, 29 August, and Richard was told by the auctioneers that it would be far easier to sell the property than find someone willing to take up the lease. Up for grabs was 15 acres of prime, arable land in the highest possible state of cultivation. There was easy access, and it was well fenced off and had good drainage.

Included in the sale was two good dairy cows, four young cattle and two fields of prime oats. The family house and offices were also part of the deal.

The sale took place on the farm and on the day, there was keen competition for No 9 Crevolea. After some frantic bidding, the winner was Mr John Kirkpatrick, from Dromore, which is south of Belfast. Mr Kirkpatrick paid a little over £237 for the property,

and Richard was pleased with the price. It was a weight off his mind, and the handover was set for 1 November. However, in the middle of October, Richard held a sale of all household goods, including a grandfather clock, sewing machine and bicycle, and the family moved out of No 9 Crevolea later that day. They were ready to move to Scotland. They would be travelling light, with only one suitcase each of private possessions.

The family were ready to embark on a new adventure, with Richard, almost literally, at the helm of the ship. But even though their prospects were greater, it was still a tough decision to leave behind a home that had held so many special memories, but reality and necessity forced Richard's hand and as they filed dutifully on to the boat, they watched with tears in their eyes as the vessel left Belfast harbour and the city soon became a distant dot on the horizon. There were more tears on the three-hour journey to Scotland, but also hope.

And with every door that closes, a new one invariably opens, so Richard secured for the family a three-bedroom flat in Dalmuir, just a short bus ride from John Brown shipyard. Glenruther Terrace had rows of red sandstone tenement flats running the entire length of one side of the street, while on the other, tenement blocks stood either side of allotments, a park and a bowling green to offer much-needed green space. Thomas Lyle's popular restaurant was further down the terrace, closer to Dumbarton Road, while many 'delinquents' could often be found in the Clydesdale Billiard Saloon, which was run by James Brown.

Dalmuir was on the outskirts of Glasgow, roughly nine miles from the centre of the city. The bus journey could take around 40 minutes, but while the city was well within reach, Dalmuir was also far enough away to be referred to as 'out in the sticks' by Glaswegians, and while not on the same rural scale as Crevolea, there were still many parks for children to play happily in.

Within two years of the family's big move, Sam had enrolled at Dalmuir School, and his father was working as a labourer in the iron shop at John Brown shipyard, before becoming a storeman with the shipping giant. Despite being born in the US, he was able to work in Scotland as he was classed as a British subject, as his mother and father had been born in Ireland.

Both William and James worked as distillery clerks, like their mother, while Bessie was a machine needle worker in Singer's sewing machine factory in nearby Clydebank. Annie was a waitress in a fish restaurant, and Nellie was a message girl with a local grocery. The employment prospects of the family had indeed been greatly enhanced by the move to Scotland, and sufficient money was coming in to run the house comfortably, albeit with a degree of prudence.

But the family wasn't yet complete, and on 5 November 1912, child number 11, Mary, was introduced to the world and was born just round the corner from the family home in Dumbarton Road. By this time, David, Jane, Richard and Sam were all at school, but with a new life in the house there was always someone around to take care of babysitting duties.

At the start of the 1960s, Sam told the *Daily Express* newspaper of his earliest memories of living in Dalmuir, and his recollections of becoming interested in football. He said, 'There was never much money for buying footballs. Johnny Forsyth in the next close, I recall, had a number two bladder, or "blether" as we called it. But my brother Dick and I had to be content with an ordinary tanner ball.

'Even on the rainiest days we were off with it up to Somerville Park. Often just the two of us. On cold, damp grass we chased and trapped and punted through endless wet afternoons. And in the evenings our mother always had to call us up from the dirt yard beside the house, as we would have been out there practising into the wee, small hours.

'Dick excelled at wee headies against the wall. In fact, he had a brown scar on his forehead from it. He was always a better player than me. Perhaps I never would have been a great footballer. I was fit and fast – as quick over a two-yard burst as [former Rangers star] Torry Gillick, I'd like to think.

'We came from farming stock but my older brother, Bob, was also into football, and when we were in Dalmuir he would tell me of the games he played in the farmyard at our old home in Crevolea with other kids. They didn't have a ball so they would kick around a pig's bladder. Although I was too small to remember that, our place must have been good football country as nearby Coleraine bred the likes of Bertie Peacock, Billy Cook and Peter Doherty, all players of great quality, and all players who would sample life at some of the top clubs.'

Robert, the second-eldest of the English brood, was the only sibling not to travel to Scotland with the family, instead opting for a new start in the USA with relatives of his father. He would serve in the US Army during the First World War and eventually settled in Delaware, Pennsylvania. Older brother James also latterly crossed the Atlantic and remained in the United States for the rest of his life.