

## ROYLE WILLIAM GOWTHORPE

The brothers John William Gowthorpe (b. 1858 – d. 1902) and Richard Appleton Gowthorpe (b. 1860 – d. 1949), sons of William Gowthorpe and Frances Appleton, came to South Africa in or before 1881. Their father was a druggist and grocer in the village of Hutton Cranswick in the East Riding of Yorkshire. John followed in his father's footsteps and in March 1881 he wrote from Graaff-Reinet about applying for a chemist's license. When this was eventually granted he settled in Newcastle in Natal. His brother was a teacher and in September 1892 he became the principal of the Dundee Government School (later the Dundee High School). On 14 February 1893, John married Annie Catherine Robertson (1876? – 1968) from Swellendam in the Cape Province and on 15 November 1895 their only child, Royle William Gowthorpe was born. A few years later the family was caught up in the South African War. When the Boer forces invaded Natal, Newcastle was occupied and John continued to supply his former clients from across the Buffalo River. On 16 May 1900 he provided some Boers with food and drink free of charge and on 19 October of that year he was convicted of high treason and fined £20. At one stage his wife was accused of sheltering, harbouring and supplying food to the enemy, but members of the local community testified in her favour and all charges against her were dropped. In 1902 John committed suicide. In the meantime, his brother had married Sarah Ann Cooper on 8 January 1896 and, during the war, was a member of the Dundee Town Guard. He went on to initiate teacher training classes at the Natal Training College in 1909 and became the institution's first principal.

When World War I broke out, Royle Gowthorpe, then a member of the South African Mounted Rifles, went to England to join the British Army and by July 1915 he was a Second Lieutenant (on probation) in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the Royal Irish Regiment. On 12 February 1915, prior to his departure, he made his last will and testament, leaving everything to May Coakes (1899-1969). In the case of her predeceasing him, it would go to his cousin Amy, his uncle Richard's daughter. At that time May was not yet 15 years old. She married Wallace Maclaren Brown, a solicitor, in September 1928. Cousin Amy (1897-1968) married Archibald Arthur Jamieson, a merchant, in August 1920. In March 1916 Roy's rank as lieutenant was confirmed and in May 1918 he was promoted to Acting Captain whilst commanding a company. The London Gazette of 11 October 1918 reported that he was mentioned in dispatches "For conspicuous gallantry and dashing

leadership of a company during a raid. Accompanied by a runner he accounted for the teams of two machine guns, and when his own bombs were exhausted he made use of the enemies'. He and his runner were the last two to return, bringing back two prisoners. His daring example inspired all ranks." It is possible (but not confirmed) that he had been in Dublin during the time of the Easter rising. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion (Reserve) of the Royal Irish Regiment were amongst the first of the British troops to be sent in to quell the rebellion. If so, it is possible that this is when he met his future wife.

In any case, on 30 July 1918, Lt. Royle Gowthorpe married Sybil Henrietta Lynch in Dublin. She was the eldest of three daughters of Sir John Patrick Lynch (b. 07/12/1858 - d. 23/08/1920), a solicitor who had been the President of the Incorporated Law Society of Ireland (1905/06), Vice Chairman of the Dublin Castle Red Cross Hospital and a Magistrate for County Dublin. Sir John was knighted in 1911 and was the son of Stanislaus J. Lynch (1831-1915), who became Registrar of the Landed Estates Court in 1871, and Land Purchase Commissioner under the Land Act of 1885. Sybil's mother was the former Frieda Ottmann (b. 1878 – d. 1960) of New York, who was 20 years his junior. It is not certain where and when an 18-year-old girl from New York and a 38-year-old solicitor from Dublin would have met. However, despite there being no trace of a passport application for her, a Frieda (or Freida) Ottman, aged 19, arrived from New York in Liverpool, via Queenstown in Ireland, on board the Umbria in October 1896. Some six weeks later, on 7 December 1896, she and John were married in Kensington, London. One can only speculate on the reason for the apparent rush to tie the bonds. Sybil was born in Dublin on 9 May 1899, followed by Maureen (1901-1965) and Olga (1904-1983).

Frieda was the daughter of William Ottmann (1845-1895) and Christine Iden (1850-1901), both whose parents emigrated from Germany to the United States. Frieda's father ran William Ottmann & Company, a successful butchery that at one stage operated from Fulton Market and her uncle, Jacob Ottmann, had a distinguished lithographic company that, amongst other things, was responsible for the printing of Puck, the first weekly magazine in the United States to offer colour illustrations. She had a younger brother named Henry Iden Ottmann (1881- 1939), whose second wife was Gail Kane (1892-1966), the silent movie actress. He travelled with her to Italy and Algeria when she starred with Lillian Gish and Ronald Colman in Henry King's "The White Sister" (1923). When he

applied for a passport in 1918, he obviously took some delight in declaring that he was travelling to England and Ireland "To adjust estate and family matters with my sister Lady Lynch". John Patrick Lynch died in 1920 and the following year Frieda married Frank Cyril Bernard.

The Lynch residence was situated in Belfield, Stillorgan Road in Booterstown, County Dublin. According to the 1901 Census, the family of three had five servants and in 1911 the Lynches, now consisting of five individuals, had added a French governess, which is probably why Sybil, when visiting the United States, could declare that she spoke English and French. The female members of the family retained their links with their American relatives. Sybil travelled there at least seven times, usually staying with her cousin, Mrs. Hinchman, of 31 Devon Road, Bronxville. Gertrude Hinchman, married to Ralph Pratt Hinchman, was the daughter of Frieda's older sister, Elsa Marguerite (b. 1875). In November 1918 Royle Gowthorpe, aged 30 and now married, also travelled to New York. He arrived on board the Empress of Britain and his nearest relative was his wife, who lived at Belfield. At that time he was still a military officer with diplomatic status and his passage was paid for by the British government. He had not visited the United States before and, incidentally, was 6'2" tall, had dark hair and hazel eyes. There were a number of other military officers on board, most of them in transit to Canada, but it doesn't appear that he was one of them. The following year he departed New York on board the SS Lapland and arrived in Liverpool on 04/02/1919.

In October 1919 Lt. R.W. Gowthorpe relinquished his position in the Royal Irish Regiment and in 1920 was granted the rank of Captain. On 16 October 1920, nearly two months after the death of her father, Sybil gave birth to John Patrick Royle Gowthorpe (1920-1993). Not long afterwards, her mother married Frank C. Bernard in either St. Martins (1921) or Paddington (1922), London. For reasons unknown, the marriage between Sybil and Royle broke up and Royle seems to have returned to South Africa. On 24 June 1921, Sybil caught the Edinburgh Castle to Durban, perhaps to see if the marriage could be saved, but obviously without success and she returned to England in October. In any case, when on 22 March 1922 she made one of her visits to New York (accompanied by little John, Frieda and Maureen) she names her mother her nearest relative, not her husband.

In the meantime, back in Natal, Royle was cast in the African Film Productions version of H. De Vere Stacpoole's novel "The reef of stars", directed by Joseph Albrecht. He played the part of the Oxford graduate Houghton, who falls in love with Molly Adair as Princess Moya. The villain, Simon Macquart, was played by Harvey Braban. While Variety didn't much care for the film, its critic said that Roy Gowthorpe as Houghton was something in the nature of a find as a juvenile (at the age of 28). The film was shown in England in September 1923 and in South Africa in February of the following year. After that we lose sight of Royle, but following his death in 1942, additional information emerged. He never returned to Sybil and, as Catholics, they could not get a divorce. Certainly Sybil never married again and died on 22 April 1979 in Cirencester, Gloucestershire. She was survived by her son, who had married Ursula M. Cheney in Evesham, Worcestershire, which is where he died in 1993.

Having survived World War I with honour, Royle Gowthorpe clearly did not find civilian life to his liking. We know that for some years he was a weighbridge clerk at Hulett's Mill at Gingindhlovu, but when World War II broke out, he joined the Union Defence Forces as a volunteer. When he left he was a sergeant in South African Medical Corps attached to the Umvoti Mounted Rifles and when practically the entire regiment was captured at Tobruk, he was amongst them. Initially he was reported as missing in action, but subsequently it was confirmed that on 21 June 1942 he died of wounds received while a prisoner-of-war. A belated death notice dated 6 June 1944 confirmed that Sybil Lynch Gowthorpe was his widow but according to the War Graves Photographic Project he was the husband of Hilda Gowthorpe.

This clearly also confused the authorities and it was not until his uncle, Richard A. Gowthorpe, wrote to the Master of the Supreme Court that some clarity emerged. However, it also raised some further questions. According to him, when Royle signed up, he gave the name of a Mrs. D.J. Steinberg as his next-of-kin. Although he was still legally married to Sybil, according to his uncle he had been living with Mrs. Steinberg as man-and-wife and they had a child together. This was Anthony Gowthorpe, born on 30 June 1937. He also stated that Royle's mother Annie was still alive and that his late father's estate still paid for her cost of living. In fact, she had subsequently married Richard Herbert Finlay, a civil service clerk, in 1906. Her brother-in-law Richard was one of the witnesses. Though Richard said that he was the only surviving relative on his father's side, there were apparently many

relatives on his mother's side of the family. He also noted that as he himself was 83 years of age and under doctor's care, he did not wish to take part in managing his nephew's estate.

The person eventually appointed to do so was Mr. Gerhard Hendrik Steenberg, also of Gingindhlovu. In subsequent correspondence it was stated that the second, unknown Mrs. Gowthorpe had not been heard of locally since 1935 and possibly resided at Lourenco Marques, Portuguese East Africa. However, as Anthony was born in 1937, this would probably not have been his mother. This same letter stated that Anthony had been staying with his father at Gingindhlovu and in his absence was being maintained by a friend, Mrs. Steenberg. In the meantime, he was attending the Weston Farm Training School in Mooi River, where the fees had been waived. In fact, the names Steenberg and Steinberg are used interchangeably and it is fair to assume that this is the same family. It is possible that D.J. and G.H. Steenberg (Steinberg) were husband and wife, and that Richard was wrong about "Mrs. Steinberg" being Anthony's mother. The South African War Graves Project states that Royle had been the son of Mr. A. Gowthorpe (sic), of Delville Estates, Gingindhlovu, Natal and was the husband of S. L. Bissett (formerly Gowthorpe) of Tzaneen and it is possible that this unknown S.L. Gowthorpe was, in fact, Anthony's mother. Anthony Royle Gowthorpe died in 1960.

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