

Barton & Childers of Co. Wicklow

By Turtle Bunbury
(Revised Edition 2013)

CreateSpace Edition, License Notes

This book is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This book may not be re-sold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each recipient. If you're reading this book and did not purchase it, or it was not purchased for your use only, then please return to createspace.com and purchase your own copy. Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author.

Barton & Childers of Co. Wicklow

Copyright © TurtleBunbury 2013

First published 2013

Create Space Edition

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a database and retrieval system or transmitted in any form or any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the prior written permission of both the owner of copyright and the above publishers.

Original illustrations/ Photographs

Barton & Childers of Co. Wicklow

Bunbury, Turtle

Contents

Barton & Childers of Glendalough.....	1
An Execution at Dawn	2
The Barton Family – Raw Hide & Vineyards	3
The Bartons of Straffan.....	4
Thomas Johnston Barton & the 1 st Lord Erskine.....	5
The Hugo Family & Glendalough House	5
Captain Robert Barton - Hero of the Zulu War	6
The Barton Girls	8
Charles Barton & Charles Parnell.....	8
The Childers Family – Bankers, Girths & Oriental Intellectuals.....	9
New Life at Glendalough.....	10
Erskine Childers –Public School & the Boer War.....	11
Molly Osgood	12
The Shaping of a Gun-Runner	13
Death on the Western Front	15
Robert Barton - An Anglo-Irish Rebel.....	15
The Last Days of Erskine Childers	17
President Erskine Childers	20
The Latter Days of Robert Barton	22
Bobby Childers & Corke Lodge	22
Erskine Barton Childers, Secretary General of WFUNA	23
Modern Times	27
Index	29
Endnotes.....	32

Barton & Childers of Glendalough

"Fide et Fortitude" (By fidelity and fortitude)



Erskine Childers' American wife Molly and Lord Monteagle's daughter Mary Spring-Rice land the Asgard at Howth with German guns for the Irish Volunteers.

The destiny of the Barton and Childers families became entwined in the 19th century when tragedy brought the children of the two houses together. The Bartons descended from the great wine-growing family of Straffan in Co. Kildare while the Childers hailed from England and were of a more intellectual bent. Their young were raised at Glendalough House, known to the family as Glan, sheltered beneath Djouce Mountain and close to the waters of Lough Dan. In the run up to independence, Robert Barton and his cousin Erskine Childers found themselves increasingly drawn into the fray. As protégés of the British public school system, they were unlikely but highly effective adherents to Sinn Fein. Executed for his beliefs, Erskine's legacy was to found a dynasty that has already produced a

President of Ireland and a senior diplomat in the United Nations at large.

An Execution at Dawn

At 7 o'clock on the morning of Friday 24th November 1922, a thin, white-haired man with a hacking cough was led outside from Dublin's Beggars Bush barracks to face a firing squad. He had been found guilty by a military tribunal of possessing a prohibited firearm, an ivory-handled .32 calibre Spanish automatic. The incriminating weapon was found during an army search of the man's adoptive childhood home at Glendalough in County Wicklow. Michael Collins, the big fellow from Cork who gave him the gun, was already dead, shot down at Béal na mBláth eight weeks earlier.ⁱ

The condemned man was Erskine Childers, one of the most unusual figures to emerge during the latter years of the fight for Irish independence. The political elite at Westminster knew him to be a methodical civil servant, a decorated veteran of the Boer War whose reconnaissance skills in the Great War earned him a promotion to Major in the British Army and a DSO. On account of his 1903 spy-thriller, "*The Riddle of the Sands*", he was also regarded as one of the most celebrated mystery writers of his time.

But in Ireland, Erskine Childers was hailed as a hero of the Republicans, the man who sailed the guns into Howth for the Irish Volunteers on board his yacht, the *Asgard*. De Valera appointed him to serve as Secretary to the Irish delegation for the treaty negotiations that ended the Anglo-Irish War. By 1921 he had become the principal spin-doctor and campaign advisor for Valera and the Anti-Treaty forces; in Childers' hands, the pen could indeed prove mightier than the sword. But his decision to turn against the Free State Government ultimately led to his execution.

Erskin Childers was born on Mount Street in London's Mayfair in 1870. His father was an English Professor, Robert Childers. His mother, Anne Barton, was the third daughter of Thomas Barton of Glendalough House, Co. Wicklow.

The Barton Family – Raw Hide & Vineyards

The Barton family descended from Thomas Barton, a Protestant soldier from Lancashire who came to Ireland with the Earl of Essex's army in 1599. Ten years later, Thomas was awarded an estate of 1000 acres in County Fermanagh for his services to the Crown. His son Anthony was one of untold thousands of Protestant settlers murdered during a savage uprising by Ulster Catholics in October 1641. Anthony's widow Margery and children were stripped of their clothing and abandoned without food on a snow-covered island in Lough Erne. Margery managed to keep the children alive by eating the hide of a dead calf. During the reign of Charles II, her son William recouped the family fortunes and became a substantial landowner in Fermanagh and Donegal. In 1725, William's grandson Tom Barton settled in Bordeaux and established himself as a wine merchant. The business boomed over the ensuing decades; by 1785 the company was shipping 125,000 barrels of wine annually. Tom and his family lived at the Château Le Bosque in Saint-Estephe but he used his wealth to increase his land-holdings in Ireland, most notably with the purchase of the Everards' estate at Grove in Co. Tipperary.

Tom's only son William married Grace Massy, a daughter of the Dean of Limerick and sister of Sir Hugh Dillon Massy of Doonas, Co. Clare. The couple had six sons and three daughters.ⁱⁱ The eldest son Thomas succeeded to Grove and was Whig MP for Fethard during the 1798 Rebellion; his descendents founded the Tipperary Foxhounds and continued to reside at Grove until the death of Captain Charles Barton in 1955. The third son, Charles, became a Lieutenant General in the

British Army and was ancestor to Sir Sidney Barton, British Ambassador to Abyssinia (1929 - 1937) and Hugh David Barton, sometime Director of the Hong Kong & Shanghai Bank. The youngest son Dunbar married Elizabeth Riall, heiress to the Rochestown estate; their grandson Sir Dunbar Plunket Barton was a prominent Judge and Senator of the National University of Ireland in the early 20th century.

William and Grace's fourth son, Hugh, was the most successful of the siblings. For reasons unclear, he succeeded to the family's wine estates on the death of his grandfather in 1780. He was only fourteen at the time. His inheritance coincided with the arrival in Parisian society of Thomas Jefferson, the mild-mannered Virginian diplomat who went on to become President of the USA. Jefferson had a great fondness for Bordeaux wines generally and the Barton vines in particular. Hugh was caught up in the French revolution and imprisoned in 1793. He subsequently fled back to Ireland, leaving the wine business to be run by Daniel Guestier. In 1802, Hugh returned to France and formed a partnership with Guestier. The resultant "B&G" wine label has since become one of the most well-known in the world. The Barton family sold their interest in B&G in the 1950s although the family has retained Châteaux Leoville Barton and Langoa vineyards to this day.

The Bartons of Straffan

In 1831, Hugh Barton purchased the Straffan estate in County Kildare from the bankrupt Henry family. He commissioned Dublin architect Frederick Darley to build a new mansion, based on Madame Dubarry's great château at Louveciennes. The Straffan estate remained with the Barton family until 1949 when Derick Barton sold the house to John Ellis of Yorkshire.ⁱⁱⁱ By his Scottish wife Anna (née Johnston), Hugh had four sons and six daughters. The eldest son Nathaniel succeeded to Straffan in 1854 and was great-grandfather to

Derick Barton who sold the estate. Derick's son Anthony is the present head of the Straffan branch and currently manages the French vineyards.

Thomas Johnston Barton & the 1st Lord Erskine

Hugh and Anna's third son, Thomas Johnston Barton, was born in Sept 1802. On 25th March 1830, shortly before his fathers' purchase of Straffan, Thomas married Frances, daughter of Edward Morris, Master in Chancery. Frances was a granddaughter of Thomas, 1st Lord Erskine, the eloquent Scots barrister who famously defended Tom Paine's "*Rights of Man*" in 1792. Lord Erskine's annual income had reached an incredible £10,000 by 1791, making him the highest paid counsel in the history of the English bar. Alas for his heirs, he subsequently invested his fortune in ill-advised American stock and lost every penny. He died insolvent in Scotland while visiting his elder brother, the 11th Earl of Buchan, in 1823. Nearly fifty years later, his family name would be reborn as the Christian name of his great-great-grandson, Erskine Childers.

The Hugo Family & Glendalough House

In the late 1830s, Thomas and Frances Barton purchased the Glendalough (or Drummin) estate at Annamoe, County Wicklow. Situated beneath Djouce Mountain and close to the waters of Lough Dan, the estate previously belonged to the Hugos, an English Protestant family, settled in Wicklow since the late 17th century, and once amongst the county's largest landowners. The Hugo estate was primarily low quality mountain terrain, encompassing the jagged southern edge of Glendalough, bounded in the east by the Avonmore and Clohogue rivers, to the north by the Powerscourt and Downshire estates and to the west by the marches.

In about 1750, Thomas Hugo inherited a parcel of land called Drummin from his uncle, Thomas Byrne of Ballymanus, and built a house. This was burned during the 1798 Rebellion, allegedly by young Billy Byrne, later executed and immortalized in several Irish ballads. It is said that Hugo, a magistrate and lieutenant of the Wicklow Yeomanry Cavalry, had fallen out with Byrne over the latter's refusal to marry one of his daughters. At any rate, a two-storied Georgian home, Drummin House, was duly erected in place of the burned shell.

In 1838, Thomas Barton converted this into a Tudor-Gothic mansion. There seems to be some uncertainty as to the identity of the architect. Mark Bence-Jones suggests John B. Keane but others hold it to have been the work of Daniel Robertson. It certainly looked like a Robertson, being particularly reminiscent of Lisnavagh House in County Carlow, built for the Bunbury family in the 1840s. By 1853, Glendalough House had a rateable value of £74, the twelfth highest for a private home in Co. Wicklow.

Captain Robert Barton - Hero of the Zulu War

Thomas and Frances raised four sons and four daughters at Glendalough. Thomas served as a Justice of the Peace and Deputy Lieutenant for Co. Wicklow. He died on 4th December 1864 and was succeeded by his eldest son, Thomas, a bachelor in his 30s. Thomas Barton II died unmarried in 1874 and was succeeded by his younger brother Charles, of whom more anon. Another brother, Hugh Barton, served with the 7th Foot but died in 1880 at the age of 46, while the youngest brother Robert Johnston Barton became one of the heroes of the Zulu War of 1879 when he died "in the attempt to save the life of a wounded brother officer" at Hlobane Mountain in South Africa.



Sponsored by men like United States President Thomas Jefferson, left, the Bartons made their fortune exporting French wine around the world. Captain Robert Barton, centre, was among the many unfortunate men killed in the Zulu War of 1879. That same year, Charles Stewart Parnell, right, became President of the Irish Land League. Parnell was a close friend of the Barton family before political differences intervened.

On 28th March 1879, the 30-year-old Captain Barton and twenty men of the Coldstream Guards were dispatched to bury some men killed by Zulus that morning. However, they mischanced upon an advance party of Zulu *impi* (mounted skirmishers) who summarily killed three-quarters of the stunned burial party. Captain Barton was wounded in the fight and his horse speared. Another officer, Lieutenant Poole, was close at hand and horseless. Without a mount, one was as good as dead. Robert decided there was room on his horse for two and urged Poole to clamber up with him. The injured horse gallantly stumbled along for several miles, hotly pursued by tireless Zulus, but finally ground to a halt. The two redcoat officers tried to continue on foot but Poole was rapidly overtaken, cornered and slain by a warrior called Chicheeli.

The Zulu king Cetshwayo had ordered that British officers be brought in alive, if possible. When Chicheeli, who

claimed to have killed six soldiers in the earlier fight, caught up with Captain Barton, he signalled for him to surrender. The Glendalough man, presumably scared witless, reached for his pistol but the mechanism jammed. Another Zulu appeared over a ridge and shot him. Furious at losing his prisoner, but determined to at least be credited with the kill, Chicheeli finished off the mortally wounded officer with his assegai. In 1880, Sir Evelyn Wood, commander of the British Army in South Africa, personally buried Captain Barton's remains; his gravesite is known to local tour guides familiar with the area today. ^{iv}

The Barton Girls

Thomas and Frances's eldest daughter, Frances Isabella, was married twice - firstly, in May 1859, to Captain James Christine Hart, 16th Lancers, of Drumcrosshall, Edinburgh, and secondly, in 1888, to Fletcher Menzies of Castle Menzies in Perthshire. The second daughter, Georgiana Susanna Arabel married George Booth, a Co. Wicklow landowner with some 1300 acres around Rathnew and Laragh, but she died prematurely in 1868. The third daughter, Anna (Mary Henrietta) married Professor Robert Childers and, as mother to Erskine, will be dealt with anon. The youngest daughter, Beatrice Louisa, was married in 1864 to Captain Hugh Francis Massy, 19th Regiment, of New Court, Bray. ^v

Charles Barton & Charles Parnell

Thomas Barton's second son, Charles William Barton, was born on 13th July 1836. As a young man, he was friendly with his neighbour Charles Stewart Parnell, sharing a passion for cricket and sawmills! However, Charles became a committed Unionist and fell out with Parnell.

As an old man, Robert Barton, the Sinn Fein TD, told Roy Foster an early memory of his nurse lifting him up to a window to see the enigmatic red-bearded patriot arriving at Glendalough House on his horse to inspect a fallen tree in the wake of a great storm in 1888. *“The inspiration of that glimpse remained”*, wrote Foster afterwards. *“It is in a way a Carlylean moment: a sudden conjunction of the personal and the “world-historical”. But it also puts back in focus the world of Parnell and his neighbours, the symbiotic way in which his life reacted upon theirs and theirs upon his”*.^{vi}

Charles succeeded to Glendalough in 1874, following the death of his elder brother Thomas. Two years later, the forty-year-old married Agnes Alexandra Childers. This was in fact the second part of a marital alliance that would bind the next generation of Bartons and Childers so tightly together. In 1870, Charles’s sister Anna – Erskine’s mother – had married Agnes’s elder brother, Professor Robert Caesar Childers, a scholar of Oriental languages and compiler of the first Pali dictionary.

The Childers Family – Bankers, Girths & Oriental Intellectuals

The Childers family originated in Yorkshire where they had made their money in banking. One of Professor Childers’s cousins was Hugh Culling Eardley Childers (1827–1896), who founded the University of Melbourne and served variously as First Lord of the Admiralty, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Home Secretary in Gladstone’s cabinet. Towards the end of his ministerial career, “HCE” Childers became so well known for his girth that he was nicknamed “Here Comes Everybody”.^{vii} Erskine Childers’s grandfather, the Rev. Charles Childers, inherited a substantial fortune and was for many years Chaplain to the English community at Nice in France and Canon of Gibraltar.

Erskine's father, Professor Robert C. Childers, was born in Nice in 1838. From 1860 to 1864, he was a respected administrator in the civil service of British Ceylon (Sri Lanka). During this time he studied Sinhalese culture, particularly the Pali language. Shortly before Erskine's birth in 1869, Robert published the first Pali text in Britain and started work on a Pali dictionary. However, ill-health obliged him to quit Ceylon and he returned to Britain. In 1873 he became the first Professor of Pali and Buddhist Literature at University College London. In 1876, the Institution of France awarded his Pali dictionary the coveted Volney Prize. Alas, consumption got the better of him that same summer and he died in London, leaving his widow with five children, of whom Erskine was the second boy.

Tragedy struck again when the determined Anna, who had nursed Professor Childers through his dying days, also succumbed to tuberculosis. She was forced to abandon her young family and seek treatment in a sanatorium. Erskine was six years old when he saw his mother being bundled into a cab by distraught relatives. Farewell embraces were prohibited; the disease was contagious. Anna lingered on for seven excruciatingly painful years and never saw her children again.

New Life at Glendalough

By the time 13-year-old Erskine Childers and his orphaned siblings arrived at the gorgeous 15,000-acre wooded demesne of Glendalough House in 1883, his uncle Charles and aunt Agnes had four children, two daughters and then two sons. Their eldest daughter Frances, born in December 1877, never married and settled in Bath. The next daughter Dulcibella arrived as a Christmas Day present in 1879; she too remained a spinster, passing away in the summer of 1956. It was for her that Erskine named the fictional yacht in "*The Riddle of the Sands*". The eldest boy Robert was born in March 1881 and named for his uncle who had been killed by the Zulus two years earlier. A

second son, Charles, was born in December 1882 and, shortly after the Childers arrived, Agnes had a third son, Thomas. With ten children now rampaging around Glendalough, or “Glan” as they called it, Charles decided to add a new wing to accommodate them all, connecting the old house to the hitherto free-standing Gothic stable block.



Erskine Childers in happier days on board the Sunbeam with his sisters Constance and Dulcibella. Centre, on active service in South Africa during the Boer War, Erskine began to have his first doubts about the morality of Empire. On the morning of his execution, right, he wrote to his wife, “It all seems perfectly simple and inevitable, like lying down after a long day’s work”.

Erskine Childers –Public School & the Boer War

In Leonard Piper’s comprehensive biography of Erskine Childers, he probes the psyche of his subject and suggests that the loss of his mother shaped the entirety of Erskine’s intense life.^{viii} While growing up at “Glan”, the home where she too had been raised, Piper suggests he became almost obsessed with her memory. Indeed Piper goes so far as to link Anna’s death to Erskine’s life-long feeling of guilt that he was somehow responsible for his father’s death and his mother’s “desertion”. At any rate, Erskine went the way of so many Anglo-Irish

children at the height of the Empire - to public school in England.

After five years at Haileybury in Hertfordshire, he went to Trinity College Cambridge to read classics and law. In 1890, shortly after he arrived at Cambridge, he learned of Charles Barton's sudden death, aged 44, from typhoid fever. It must have seemed like yet another abandonment for the two men had been very close.

In 1895, Erskine found work as a Committee Clerk in the House of Commons, a tedious job but one that gave him a useful training for later life. For fun, he and his brother enjoyed taking their yacht up around the rocky coastline of the North Sea, keeping an eye on Germany's ever-growing naval might.

When the Boer War broke out at the close of 1898, Erskine was one of tens of thousands of young flag-waving imperialists to enlist in the army and set sail for South Africa. However, the smouldering remains of Boer farmhouses and, in time, the emergence of disease-riddled concentration camps had a profound impact on Erskine. Over the course of ten months service, he began to seriously question the ideas of Imperialism. He became an adept student of guerrilla warfare. A number of volumes based on his Boer War diaries and letters were published to high acclaim shortly afterwards.

It was his taut 1903 thriller, "*The Riddle of the Sands*", that made him a household name. The book, hailed as the first spy novel, follows the adventures of two young Englishmen who sail a yacht into the North Sea only to stumble upon a German attempt to invade northeast England from the Frisian Islands.

Molly Osgood

Shortly after "*The Riddle*" was published, Erskine visited the United States. Here he met and fell in love with Mary (Molly) Alden Osgood. She was a direct descendant of one of America's oldest families; her ancestors had been on board the

Mayflower. Molly's father, Dr. Hamilton Osgood, was a prominent Boston physician credited with introducing Pasteur's rabies antibodies to America. Molly had fractured both hips as a child and spent twelve years on her back. She was obliged to use two canes to support herself for the remainder of her life. Despite this disability, she shared Erskine's passion for the sea and was an accomplished helmsman. Erskine and Molly were married in 1904. His cousin Robert Barton stood as Best Man. Dr. Osgood presented the newlyweds with a 50-foot gaff ketch, built by Norwegian designer Colin Archer. The elegant white yacht was named the *Asgard*, Old Norse for "Home of the Gods".

Molly's sister Gretchen, a renowned singer and actress, was married to a wealthy Bostonian, Fiske Warren.^{ix} Shortly before Erskine and Molly met, Gretchen and her daughter, Rachel, were painted by John Singer Sargent in the Gothic Room of Fenway Court, Isabella Gardner's Venetian Palace in Boston. Many years later, Rachel married Erskine's cousin, Robert Barton^x

Erskine and Molly settled in London soon afterwards. Their first son, Erskine Hamilton Childers, was born in Chelsea the following year; he would go on to become President of Ireland. A second son Henry was born in 1907 but died after a few months. A third son, Robert Alden, was born in 1910 and proved healthy and strong. The Childers social life was low-key and involved much sailing around the North Sea and the Baltic. Erskine continued his career as a writer, completing Volume 5 to *The Times'* acclaimed "*History of the War in South Africa*" in 1907.

The Shaping of a Gun-Runner

In 1908, Erskine joined his cousin Robert and Horace Plunkett on a motor tour of southern Ireland. The experience convinced the cousins that colonialism was fundamentally wrong and they began to espouse Home Rule. Erskine promptly

resigned from the House of Commons and, with his wife's support, wrote and published *The Form and Purpose of Home Rule* in 1912. His thesis proposed giving Ireland, like Canada, dominion status. This would permit its independence in internal affairs while remaining under the British flag.

In April 1914, word reached London that the Ulster Volunteers had landed at Larne with a shipment of German rifles for Carson's Orangemen. Erskine and Molly soon joined a committee of well-to-do Republican sympathizers who met at Alice Stopford Green's home in London; Lord Ashbourne, Sir George and Lady Young and Sir Alexander Lawrence were also on the committee. The sum of £1524 was raised and a plan hatched.

Daniel Figgis, of the bookselling family, was dispatched to Hamburg where he concluded an arms deal. On July 12th, Erskine, Molly, Mary Spring-Rice (cousin of the British Ambassador in Washington), a British aviator and two Donegal fishermen sailed the *Asgard* out to meet the German tug *Gladiator* on the high seas. The arms were transferred and the *Asgard* returned, through a near fatal storm, to land at Howth Harbour on July 26th.

Standing on the pier were forty Volunteers headed by Bulmer Hobson and the O'Rahilly. The latter was another principal of the Easter Rising wedded to an American, in this instance Nancie Browne of Browne's Mills, New Jersey. He gallantly kissed Molly's hand upon disembarking, saying in his thick Kerry brogue, "*You're the greatest soldier here, Ma'am, indeed ye are*".

The *Asgard's* cargo contained 900 Mauser rifles and 20,000 rounds of ammunition. The arms were rapidly distributed amongst the Irish Volunteers. Meanwhile Mary Spring-Rice's Limerick cousin, Conor O'Brien, and Sir Thomas Myles landed their yachts at Kilcoole, Co. Wicklow, adding a further 600 Mausers and 20,000 rounds to the cauldron. Fears of

civil war between the North and South were now very real indeed.

However, within a few short days of the *Asgard's* landing, the whole world was at war. Forty-four year old Erskine threw himself into the Allied cause, donning the dark blue uniform of a lieutenant in the Volunteer Reserve. His reconnaissance skills and knowledge of the German coastline made him invaluable to the Admiralty and he was assigned as an observer and intelligence officer on one of the naval seaplanes carried by *HMS Engadine*. The former gun-runner participated in the air raid on Cuxhaven in November 1914 and on sorties to the Dardanelles, the North Sea and Palestine. He was awarded the DSO and left the services with the rank of Major.

Death on the Western Front

His Barton cousins did not fare so well. On 14th July 1916, the youngest boy Thomas, a Second Lieutenant with the Inniskillings, was killed at the head of his men, while leading a charge at the Somme. He had been educated at Fettes and Cambridge and was a veteran of Gallipoli. Two years later, on 31st August 1918, Thomas's elder brother, Captain Charles Barton, was killed in a gas attack while marooned in a trench in France. He was 36 years old. It is not known whether he was aware that his mother, Agnes Barton, had passed away less than two weeks earlier. As a young man, Charles had married Nora Grace Greene, daughter of Henry Richard Greene of Bank House in Arklow. They had no children.^{xi}

Robert Barton - An Anglo-Irish Rebel

The eldest of the Barton boys, Robert, survived the war intact. Born in March 1881, Erskine's "best man" was just nine

years old when he succeeded his father at "Glan". He was subsequently educated at Rugby School, Christchurch College Oxford, and the Royal Agricultural College in Cirencester. By the time of his road trip with Erskine in 1908, he was regarded as a progressive landlord. From 1910, he sat on the Committee of the Irish Agricultural Organization Society.

Robert was serving with the Royal Dublin Fusiliers in Dublin when the Easter Rising broke out in 1916. However, he was so disgusted by the execution of the rebel leaders that he immediately resigned his commission and joined the Republican movement. At the close of 1917 he was employed on the Secretariat of the Irish Convention, working specifically for those advocating the Dominion scheme. But when the Convention collapsed and the British began to consider the idea of conscription in Ireland, he abandoned his commitment to peaceful change in favour of armed struggle, moved to Dublin, became an Irish citizen and joined Sinn Fein.

Robert Barton, an Anglo-Irish Protestant and Master of Glendalough, was elected Sinn Fein MP for West Wicklow in 1918. He was simultaneously appointed Chairman of Wicklow County Council. In February 1919 he was arrested for making seditious speeches and imprisoned at Mountjoy. Collins helped him escape on 16th March; Robert left a note for the Governor explaining that he could no longer stay as the service was dissatisfactory. Moreover, he wondered, would they mind looking after his luggage until he sent for it? He was re-arrested in January 1920 and sentenced to a further three years in England's Portland Gaol.

When Erskine visited, he found his cousin sporting "*his usual cheery smile*" with his prison uniform of khaki and broad arrows and a khaki forage cap. He was released on the signing of the Truce in 1921 and, in the first Dáil, elected to represent Sinn Fein for Kildare-Wicklow. He was also Minister of Agriculture and later Minister for Economic Affairs. He

founded the National Land Bank in 1921; Erskine was appointed one of its five directors.

The Last Days of Erskine Childers

By now the British public regarded Erskine as a traitor. He continued unabated, rising through the ranks of Sinn Fein to be appointed by de Valera to succeed Desmond Fitzgerald (arrested in February 1920) as de facto Director of Propaganda for the underground Dáil cabinet. De Valera had been introduced to Childers by Michael Collins.

According to the book 'Eamon de Valera', by The Earl of Longford and Thomas P. O'Neill (page 119): 'From the very first de Valera was deeply impressed by Childers. Of all the men he ever met in politics he had the highest regard for him. He said much later that if he could choose a person along whose lines of character he would like to have modelled himself, that person would have been Childers. Childers was both thinker and writer, a bold adventurous spirit and, above all, an inflexible idealist. Childers had served with distinction with the British Army in the Boer War.

In May 1921, he was elected to the Dáil for County Wicklow. He simultaneously served as editor of *The Irish Bulletin*, a Republican newsletter founded to counter British propaganda, in which he addressed England as follows:

"You own a third of the earth by conquest; you have great armies, a navy so powerful that it can starve a whole continent, and a superabundance of every instrument of destruction that science can devise. You wield the greatest aggregate of material force every concentrated in the hands of one power; and while canting about your championship of small nations, you use it to crush out liberty in ours. We are a small people with a population dwindling without cessation under your rule. We have no armaments nor any prospect of obtaining them. Nevertheless, we accept your challenge and

will fight you with the same determination, with the same resolve as the American States, North and South, put into their fight for their freedom against your Empire."

Erskine served as Chief Secretary for the Peace Delegation that negotiated the Anglo-Irish Treaty between October and December 1921 and which effectively created the Irish Free State in 1922.

Robert Barton was one of the five delegates and was the last, most reluctant, signatory to the troublesome Treaty. He regarded it "*as the lesser of two outrages forced upon me and between which I had to choose*". However, with the progression of time, Erskine had taken de Valera's side. He steadfastly refused to offer his support to the Treaty because it failed to grant Ireland the unconditional independence with which he was now obsessed. When the Free State was formed, Erskine and Robert were among those who turned their backs on the Dáil and joined the IRA, pledging to sabotage the Treaty "*by speech, writing and action, both in peace and, when it came to the disastrous point, in war*". Countess Markiewicz and the Cumann na mBan were so inclined to follow Erskine's militant line that they were soon nicknamed the "Women and Childers Party".

But the war years had taken their toll on Erskine. He was 50 years old and looked 70 - his hair white, his face gaunt, his body racked by a constant cough that must have brought to mind the TB that carried away his parents. It was not just the British who regarded him as a traitor but also the new Free State government; Griffith now referred to him as a "*damned Englishman*".

On 17th November 1922, Erskine Childers, a hunted man, was hiding out at his beloved "Glan". Word of his presence leaked; Free State soldiers rapidly surrounded the ancestral Barton house. According to one account, "Childers was in his bedroom off the long gallery on the second floor of the house. Emerging at the commotion, he drew his pistol just as three of the troops approached up the stairs, rifles leveled. Childers

cocked his gun but, before he could fire, an old family servant, rushing up the stairs, threw himself in front of the troops, crying: "You'll not shoot Mr. Childers!" Then he was seized from behind.^{xiii} That same afternoon, the Government's new hard-line policy commenced with the execution of four Dublin Volunteers for possession of revolvers.

There is much debate as to the real reasons behind Erskine's execution. Was he taken out simply because his intelligence posed too great a risk to the Free State Government? Just weeks before his execution, *The Irish Times* special correspondent concluded that "there is no doubt that Mr. Childers is the chief military brain among the Irregulars". He was Director of Publicity for the IRA and Editor of the Republican broadsheet, *Poblacht na hEireann*.^{xiii} Ireland was locked into an appalling civil war and the Irregulars with whom he had allied himself were now spear-heading an assassination campaign against Dáil members, judges and police. Moreover, an appeal for Habeas Corpus was pending in the courts the day he was executed.

At 6am on 24th November 1922, Erskine Childers wrote to his wife Molly: "It all seems perfectly simple and inevitable, like lying down after a long day's work". Accompanied by his childhood friend, the Reverend Edward Waller, Dean of Kildare, he was taken to the courtyard in Beggar's Bush Barracks. As they reached their destination, Erskine turned to Waller and said, "I am at peace with the world. I bear no grudge against anyone and trust no one bears any against me". He then shook hands with each member of the firing squad, several of whom were struggling to maintain control. The officer-in-charge marched him to a wall and saluted. The squad took up their positions. "Come closer, boys", Erskine called out, "it will be easier for you". He faced them without blindfold or binding. The volley rang out.^{xiv}

De Valera was heartbroken at the news. To Joe McGarrity he wrote:

'He died the Prince that he was. Of all the men I ever met I would say he was the noblest. The gun he had in his possession was an automatic that Mick (Collins) gave him, telling him that it was to

defend the Republic. I saw it with him myself - a tiny automatic, little better than a toy and in no sense a war weapon.'

Among those voices loudest in condemnation of Erskine Childers was that of Winston Churchill, who once praised "*The Riddle of the Sands*" as the best reason to justify naval rearmament - and then met its author during the Treaty negotiations. "*No man has done more harm or more genuine malice*", exaggerated Churchill, "*or endeavoured to bring a greater curse upon the common people of Ireland than this strange being, actuated by a deadly and malignant hatred for the land of his birth*".

President Erskine Childers

Erskine's eldest son Erskine Hamilton Childers was born in London in 1905 and educated at Gresham School, Norfolk. Shortly before his father's execution, he visited him in prison. The older man asked whether he too intended to go into Irish politics; young Erskine said he did. His father urged him to say nothing that might promote bitterness, a request the future President honoured to the end. He then read history at Cambridge, before moving to Paris as European manager for an American travel organization.

He returned to Ireland in 1932 and, already a member of Fianna Fail, became advertising manager for the newly founded *Irish Press*. From 1936 to 1944 he was Secretary of the Federation of Irish Manufacturers. In 1938, he was elected TD for Athlone-Longford. He was one of the very few gentry to attain such a seat. He served the Dail without a break for the next thirty-five years, earning a reputation as a dedicated and conscientious worker. He subsequently held a number of ministerial posts in the cabinets of Eamon de Valera, Sean Lemass and Jack Lynch. As Minister of Posts & Telegraphs, he was a good man to have on your side if you wanted a telephone installed.

He was a wholehearted supporter of Radio Eireann and established it as a statutory corporation. As TD for Monaghan,

he was particularly outspoken in his denunciation of Charles Haughey and Neil Blayney for allegedly importing arms for the Provisional IRA. The two ex-Ministers were tried and acquitted. In the summer of 1969, he succeeded Frank Aiken as Tanaiste. Like Ms. Harney, he combined this role with that of Minister of Health.

The Boston-born poetess Isabella Gardner once told Ulick O'Connor how she and Erskine had enjoyed "*a torrid love affair when she was 19!*" She showed him a press full of letters "*so hot that sometimes she feels she should put them in an icebox in case they go on fire*". O'Connor's childhood home was close to "*good old Erskine*". In his diaries, he recalls how the future President was "*often to be found in our drawing room discussing medical matters with my father, to whom he once confided that his ambition in life was to have been a medical surgeon*".

In 1925, he married Ruth Dow, daughter of an American general. They had two sons and three daughters. After Ruth's death in 1952, Erskine married secondly Rita Dudley, a popular member of the British Embassy in Dublin. Rita, a Catholic, gave him another daughter and was to prove a delightful hostess for all who came to the Childers home, particularly when they lived at the vice-regal lodge in Phoenix Park.

In the presidential election of May 30th 1973, Erskine Childers, the mild-mannered, half-American scion of an Anglo-Irish household, caused considerable surprise when he defeated the zealous Tom O'Higgins to succeed de Valera as Ireland's fourth President.

He proved to be a vibrant, charismatic and hard-working President, winning widespread respect from the people of Ireland. It was his great hope that he could make the Irish Presidency a real and valuable institution but he was quickly put in line by the powers that were.

He died suddenly of coronary thrombosis while making a public speech in Dublin in November 1974. His State funeral at St. Patrick's Cathedral was attended by several world leaders

including Vice-President Gerald Ford, Lord Mountbatten, Harold Wilson and most of the crowned heads and Presidents of Europe. Many thought Erskine's widow Ruth would be offered the office of President to continue his work but the post instead went to the former Chief Justice, Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh.

Erskine was buried at Derrylossory, the churchyard by Glendalough House.^{xv} Among those who watched the Presidential coffin being lowered into the grave was his father's best man and cousin, the elderly Robert Barton, the last surviving signatory of the 1921 Treaty.

The Latter Days of Robert Barton

After Erskine's execution in 1922, Robert Barton continued to support de Valera. He was elected to the Dáil in June 1922, but did not take his seat or seek re-election later. From 1934 to 1954, he was Chairman of the Agricultural Credit Corporation. He was also a director and Chairman of Bord na Móna for many years. In the summer of 1950, the 69-year-old finally took a wife - Rachel Lothrop Warren, the daughter of Fiske Warren and niece of Molly Childers who, as a child, was painted by Sargent. Robert died peacefully at "Glan" aged 95 on 8th August 1975.

Bobby Childers & Corke Lodge

President Childers' younger brother Robert "Bobby" Childers inherited "Glan" on Robert's death in 1975. The main Gothic house was demolished two years later although parts of the remains have since been ingeniously re-erected by Alfred Cochrane in the gardens of Corke Lodge. Bobby died on 7th August 1996 aged 85. He was buried alongside his wife, Christabel Susan Childers, who had died that very day twelve years earlier at the age of 78.



Family Affair: The family of President Erskine Childers (left) are politically active to this day. His daughter-in-law, Mallica Vajrathon-Childers (center), a Thai citizen, was Principal Adviser to Boutros Boutros-Ghali during the Fourth World Conference on Women. His granddaughter, Nessa Childers (right) is a Green Party member and was elected to represent the Blackrock ward in Dublin in 2004.

Erskine Barton Childers, Secretary General of WFUNA

President Childers' eldest son, Erskine Barton Childers, was a free-thinker, critic and constructive analyst who rose to become the highest ranking Irishman involved in international diplomacy, although never as a representative of his native State. He was born in Dublin on 11th March 1929. He was educated at Newtown School in Waterford and went on to Trinity College Dublin where he read history and modern languages. He subsequently studied politics and international relations at Stanford University in California. By the age of 21, he was travelling the world as vice-president of the United States National Students' Association.



Mrs. Fiske Warren (Gretchen Osgood) and Her Daughter Rachel, by John Singer Sargent (1903). Rachel later married Robert Barton. She presented this beautiful painting to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.



Three Generations: Erskine Barton Childers (back right), Secretary General of WFUNA, with his Thai wife, Mallica (back left), young son Erskine Caesar Childers and his parents, the President and Mrs. Childers.

He lectured and broadcast on foreign affairs for much of the 1960s, joining the United Nations in 1967. He was soon despatched to Asia to work with the UN and there met his Eurasian wife, Mallica Vajrathon-Childers, then Regional Information Officer for UNICEF in Asia. Mallica's grandfather, Joseph Caulfield James was tutor to the Siamese Court from 1898 to 1911.

They worked together for ten years in the UNDP/UNICEF Regional Project on Development Support before Erskine was transferred to New York as Director of the

UNDP Division of Information. Mallica simultaneously went to work with the UNFPA in Population Education and Communication. Born in 1971, their son Erskine Caesar Childers was named in honour of Robert Caesar Childers, the Asian scholar who wrote the Bali-English dictionary.

Erskine B Childers summed up his beliefs by saying: *"Development is about people; all else is technique"*. Following his retirement from the UN in 1989, he continued to work as a consultant for it and other bodies. He strongly criticized the UN for its role in the First Gulf War. In 1991, he wrote to *The Irish Times*: *"The UN's most priceless strength, the confidence of its membership as a whole in its integrity and even handedness, has been profoundly weakened. Acting together, the great majority can, and must, repair this. Never again should our United Nations and our Charter - which are not the property of the major powers - be left so vulnerable to such apocalyptic abuse."*

He was also deeply concerned with the growing gulf between the worlds' rich and poor, admonishing the "myopic elite" of industrialized nations. In an address given at the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) in Winnipeg, Canada, in 1995 he wrote: *"If we who are already adults are brutally honest with ourselves, we know that unless we now make these United Nations instruments work, then beyond all remaining doubt we are going to leave to our children and their children a world we would not wish to live in ourselves"*. In March 1996, he was appointed Secretary General of the World Federation of United Nation Associations (WFUNA).

During the last years of his life, he had lived with the international lawyer Marjolijn Snippe, with whom he had a son, (Patrick Seán) David Barton Childers. The boy was born on 2nd June 1996, less than three months before Erskine's sudden death in Luxembourg on August 25th 1996.

His death, which occurred shortly after he delivered a speech at the 50th Anniversary Congress of the WFNUA, echoed that of his father twenty-two years earlier in that both men died

at the height of their careers. One of his last acts had been to recommend President Mary Robinson as a potential successor to Boutros Boutros-Ghali as Secretary General of the UN. His death robbed Mrs. Robinson of a valuable supporter and Kofi Annan secured the post in December 1996.^{xvi}

His widow Mallica Vajrathon-Childers, a Thai citizen, continues to work with UNICEF, UNFPA and the United Nations Secretariat in New York. She was Principal Adviser to Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali during the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. She subsequently edited *Women of Asia Online* before retiring to take up work as a Senior Consultant to UNFPA as tutor for the Distance Learning Course on Population Issues via Internet. She operates a consultancy in New York, concentrating on gender issues and the advancement of women, coordinating the UN action plan for the implementation of the Security Council Resolution on Women, Peace and Security.

Modern Times

In the local elections of 2004, Erskine III's younger sister, Nessa Childers, a Green Party member of the Dun Laoghaire and Rathdown County Council, was elected to represent the Blackrock ward.

Thus the Barton and Childers names continues to play an important role in both Irish and international politics. As to the demesne where they grew up, a new "Glendalough House" has been built in the stables and, with 1500 acres of private woodlands and pasture, operates today as an upmarket tourism venue. The estate has been used as a location for films such as "*Excalibur*" and "*Michael Collins*".^{xvii} Perhaps one day, there will be a remake of "*The Riddle of the Sands*" (pictured below) which, though unsuccessful at the box office in 1979, is regarded as one of the best sailing films ever made.

At the start of the Tall Ships Race in July 2005, the ship which led the 130-strong flotilla out of Waterford harbour was called *Asgard II*. This sumptuous three-masted tall ship was commissioned by the State to serve as the flagship of the Irish Navy and built in 1981 by the late Jack Tyrrell of Arklow. Molly Childers sold the original *Asgard* in 1926 and it passed through many hands until its purchase by the Irish Government in 1961. It was kept for many years at Kilmainham Gaol in Dublin but is currently undergoing restoration. Dublin businessman Harry Crosbie is at the helm.



Index

- Annamoe, 8
Archer, 16
Arklow, 19, 31
Arnold, 32
Asgard, 5, 16, 17, 18, 31
Ashbourne, 17
Athlone, 23
Avonmore, 9
Ballymanus, 9
Barton, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 15, 16,
18, 19, 21, 25, 28, 31
Bath, 13
Beijing, 30
Bence-Jones, 9
Blayney, 23
Boer War, 5, 14, 15
Bolton, 32
Booth, 11
Bordeaux, 6, 7
Boston, 16, 24, 32
Boutros-Ghali, 25, 30
Bray, 11
Browne, 17
Bunbury, 9
Byrne
 Billy, 9
 Thomas, 9
California, 29
Cambridge, 15, 18, 23
Canada, 17, 29
Carlow, 9
Caulfield, 29
Cecil, 32
Ceylon, 13
Childers, 4, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 13,
14, 16, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25,
27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32
Churchill, 22
Clare, 6, 32
Cochrane, 27
Collins, 5, 19, 31
Cork, 5
Corke Lodge, 27
Crosbie, 31
Dardanelles, 18
de Valera, 23, 24
De Valera, 5
Deane-Drake, 32
Donegal, 6, 17
Doonas, 6
Dow, 24
Downshire, 9
Drummin House, 9
Dublin, 5, 7, 19, 22, 24, 28, 31
Dudley, 24
Ellis, 7
England, 4, 15, 20
Erne, 6
Essex, 6
Europe, 24
Fermanagh, 6
Fethard, 6
Figgis, 17
FitzGerald, 32
Ford, 24
Foster, 12, 32
France, 7, 13, 18
Gallagher, 32

Gardner, 16, 24
Germany, 15
Gladstone, 12
Glendalough, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 12,
13, 19, 25, 31
Greene, 19
Griffith, 21
Grove, 6
Guestier, 7
Haileybury, 15
Hamburg, 17
Hamilton, 16
Hart, 11
Haughey, 23
Henry, 7
Hertfordshire, 15
Hobson, 17
Hong Kong, 7
Hugo, 8
Jefferson, 7, 32
Johnston, 7, 8, 9
Keane, 9
Kerry, 18
Kilcoole, 18
Kildare, 4, 7, 20, 22, 32
Kilmainham Gaol, 31
Lahinch, 32
Laragh, 11
Lawrence, 17
Lemass, 23
Limerick, 6, 18
Lisnavagh House, 9
London, 6, 13, 16, 17, 23, 32
Longford, 23
Lynch, 23

Markiewicz, 21
Massy, 6, 11, 32
Mayfair, 6
McClory, 32
Meath, 32
Menzies, 11
Monaghan, 23
Morris, 8
Mountbatten, 24
Myles, 18
New Ross, 32
Nice, 13
Norfolk, 23
Ó Dálaigh, 24
O'Brien, 18
O'Connor, 24
O'Higgins, 24
O'Rahilly, 17
Osgood, 16
Oxford, 19
Palestine, 18
Palmer, 32
Paris, 23, 32
Parnell, 11, 12, 32
Persia, 32
Piper, 32
Plunkett, 17
Poole, 10
Powerscourt, 9
Rathdown, 31
Rathnew, 11
Robertson, 9
Robinson, 30
Rochestown, 7
Rugby, 19

Sands, 5, 14, 15, 22, 31
Sargent, 16, 26
Scotland, 8
Smurfit, 32
Spring-Rice, 17
Stopford, 17
Straffan, 4, 7, 8, 32
The Island, 32
Tipperary, 2, 6, 32
Tyrrell, 31
Vajrathon-Childers, 29

Waller, 22
Warren, 16, 25, 32
Waterford, 28, 31
Westminster, 5
Wexford, 32
Wilson, 24
Wood, 11
York, 29, 30
Yorkshire, 7, 12
Young, 17
Zulus, 10, 14

Endnotes

- ⁱ *Erskine Childers*, Jim Ring (John Murray, 1996).
- ⁱⁱ The daughters Grace, Elizabeth and Margaret married respectively John Palliser of Derryluskan, Co. Tipperary, Sir Augustine FitzGerald of Moy House, Lahinch, Co. Clare and the 3rd Baron Massy.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Subsequent owners of Straffan House included the James Bond film producer Kevin McClory, a fanatical show-jumper from Persia who was assassinated during the 1979 Revolution, the ill-fated property tycoon Patrick Gallagher and Dr. Michael Smurfit, Chairman of the Jefferson Smurfit Group. The latter converted the house into the 5 star Kildare Hotel & Country Club. The K-Club, as it is known today, has two world class golf courses designed by Arnold Palmer, a legendary US professional. In September 2006, it plays host to the Ryder Cup.
- ^{iv} *Zulu Mountain Trap Sprung*, William Watson Race and Jon Guttman, *Military History Magazine*, June 1996.
- ^v Hugh and Beatrice's eldest son Hugh Massy lived at Stackallen in Co. Meath and married Gladys Briscoe of Bellinter House; another son, Godfrey, married Eva, elder daughter of William Bolton of The Island in Co. Wexford.
- ^{vi} "*Parnell & His Neighbours*", RF Foster, *Wicklow History & Society* (Geography Publications, 1994).
- ^{vii} *The Life & Correspondence of the Rt. Hon. Hugh CE Childers*, Spencer Childers, 1901.
- ^{viii} *Dangerous Waters – The Life and Death of Erskine Childers*, Leonard Piper (Hambledon & London, 2003).
- ^{ix} Gretchen had studied singing with Gabriel Fauré and drama with Constant Coquelin (the actor who created the role of *Cyrano de Bergerac*) in Paris. At one time, she was offered academic positions at both Wellesley and Radcliffe colleges, offers she declined.
- ^x The painting, entitled "*Mrs. Fiske Warren and Her Daughter*" now hangs in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Gretchen died in 1961.
- ^{xi} In August 1919, a year after Charles's death, Nora married Captain Cecil John Venables Deane-Drake of Stokestown, New Ross, Co. Wexford. Captain Drake served with the Royal Munster Fusiliers during the war but was captured and imprisoned at Etreux and Osnabruck. Their only child, June Drake, was born in 1927 and married Major James

Stewart. As a wedding present, Captain Deane-Drake presented his daughter with Landscape House, a beautiful house overlooking the River Barrow.

^{xii} *Erskine Childers*, Jim Ring, p. 283.

^{xiii} *The Trial Statement of Erskine Childers*, Wolfe Tone Annual (Brian O hUiginn, 1937).

^{xiv} *Pen and Sword: The Enigma of Erskine Childers*, Brett F. Woods. (2003)

^{xv} *Erskine Childers: President of Ireland*, John N. Young (Colin Smythe, 1999).

^{xvi} *The Irish Times, Obituary*, by Paul Cullen, 26 August 1996:

^{xvii} www.glendaloughstates.com

DENNIS OF FORTGRANITE