

MINNA STAFFORD O'BRIEN.

Born 12th October 1857: Died 1944.

Minna Augusta Ongley was born on the 12th October 1857 at Chalepa near Canea (modern day Hania), on the island of Crete. Her father, Henry Sarell Ongley was the British Consul there, and had been for the previous twenty years. However the following year the family followed Henry to Patras in the Peloponnese, where he had taken up a new appointment as the British Consul to the Morea

Minna was the ninth child that her mother, Lucy had born, though she grew up with seven elder siblings, and saw her mother have four more after her. She, therefore, grew up in a large family in Patras.

Just before her fifth birthday, one of elder brothers, Alfred, died, aged eleven. But apart from him the rest of her siblings grew up with her.

When Minna was thirteen her eldest sister, Charlotte, married Lieutenant Francis Stafford O'Brien, who was a member of the ship's company of the H.M.S. Enterprise. This link between the Ongley's and the Stafford O'Brien's would in due course lead to Minna marrying Lucius Stafford O'Brien, the youngest brother of Francis.

After her father retired in 1874, the family moved to Cyprus. Minna was now in her late teens, and in 1884, she married Lucius.

With Lucius, they had a large family: Lucy was born in 1885; Florence in 1887; Humphrey was born on the 10th February 1889, whilst Minna was staying with her sister Charlotte at Tixover Hall. Then Terence was born in 1893 and young Lucius Henry Stafford O'Brien was born in 1898.

By 1905, the family were living at Upper Fahan in Donegal, close to Londonderry. These were troubled times for Ireland and the issue of Home Rule and the fight for the Union was starting. Minna's sister Evelyn, recorded in her book "Arms and the Woman" her own experience in Ulster in these years, and her knowledge is gained only through her sister living there. To what extent Minna and Lucius were involved is now impossible to say but Eve recorded the arms running to the loyalist households in such a way that she must have had some trusted insight.

"... law-abiding members of society had become involved in a gigantic conspiracy, the culminating point of which was the landing of arms at Larne. The organisation had been extraordinarily good, and up to the last moment the secret as to the exact spot of the landing and distribution had been kept. Then the word went round, and in a trice every car and trap in the whole countryside was at Larne; the arms and ammunition were loaded up, lists handed to drivers, and the contraband was delivered at every house in the North of Ireland which was in the occupation of loyalists. The system was extraordinarily efficient, and I well remember the innocent family party presented by some friends of mine, husband, wife and daughter, in their car, sitting placidly on seats beneath which the weapons and cartridges were stowed."

In 1914 Lucius the youngest of her children died, and then in 1915, Minna's husband, Lucius died too.

Minna's sister Evelyn was involved with Le Comite Britannique of the French Red Cross and was providing a canteen for the French Army. Minna joined her sister's enterprise and was involved with this canteen at Revigny, throughout the war.

In 1918, Minna received the sad news that so many had received over the previous four years. Her eldest son, Captain Humphrey Donatus Stafford O'Brien, M.C. and Bar, had been killed on the 14th September 1918. He had joined up with the 1st Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment, but had become attached to the newly created Royal Air Force. He was killed fighting in Mesopotamia fighting against the Ottoman Empire.

After the war Minna returned to Donegal. Her eldest sister Charlotte was there, but she died on 13th April 1919.

Minna herself died in 1946, having outlived all her brothers and sisters.