

THE POYNTZ FAMILY OF ACTON

BY SEAN McCLORY



Acton Court

Members of the Poyntz family were among the most influential dynasties in Co. Armagh in the seventeenth century and two of our local place-names today derive directly from them, for they gave their own family surname to the village of 'Poyntz'pass and the name of the village of their origin in Gloucestershire, to nearby Acton.

So who were they and how did they get here?

According to one source, a form of the surname Poyntz first reached England at the time of the Norman conquest in 1066. From earliest records in the twelfth century, members of the family were knighted, made sheriffs of Gloucestershire, elected to Parliament, appointed as Commissioners of the Peace, were prominent in the legal profession, benefactors to the church, active in senior ranks of the army and navy, successful shipping merchants from the port of Bristol, guests to the Royal Court and hosts to three English Kings.

Their associations with Ireland began as early as 1494 when Sir Robert Poyntz received a commission to muster and ship an army to Ireland, from Bristol. In the next century, Sir Nicholas Poyntz had a command in Ireland when in June 1534 he assisted his uncle Sir John St. Loe, in suppressing the revolt of Silken Thomas Fitzgerald, 10th Earl of Kildare.

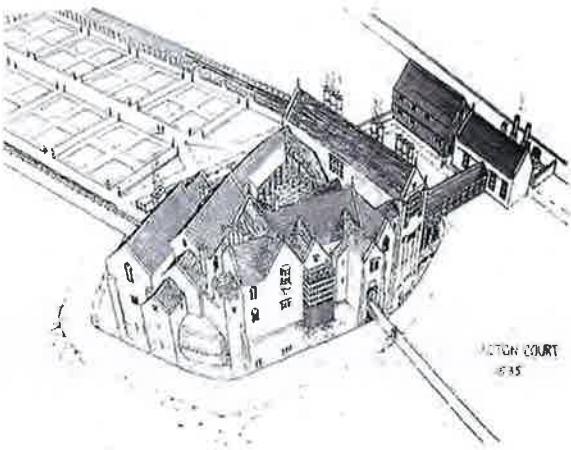


Poyntz's Lane, Kilkenny

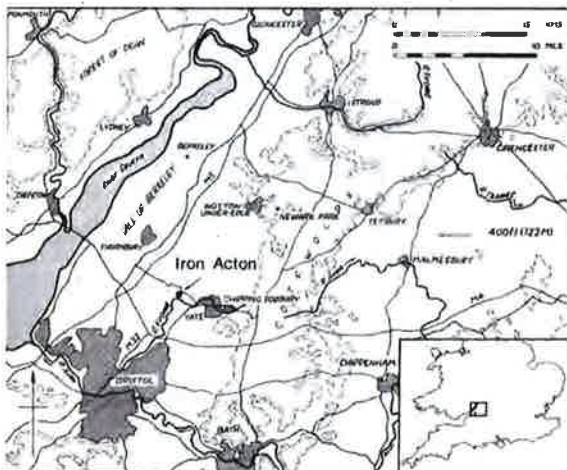
Our chief interest lies in Charles Poyntz, who in 1610 was granted 200 acres in the townlands of "*Brenock, and the third part of Listray (= Lisraw?) balliboe*" near the present village of Poyntzpass. Charles' sister, Elizabeth, Lady Thurles, wife of Thomas Viscount Thurles and daughter of Sir John Poyntz, was the mother of James FitzThomas Butler, 1st Duke of Ormonde, who was, arguably, the most powerful Englishman in Ireland in the mid-seventeenth century. His main residence was

Kilkenny Castle and the maternal family surname has been preserved in "Poyntz's Lane" in Kilkenny city centre.

Much of the information given hereafter derives from two main sources - chapter 2 "*The History of Acton Court*" by Jean Manco in *Acton Court: The evolution of an early Tudor courtier's house*, by editors Kirsty Rodwell and Robert Bell, published by English Heritage, London 2004, and a much rarer volume, *Historical and Genealogical Memoir of the Family of Poyntz or Eight Centuries of an English House* by Sir John Maclean (of which only seventy-five copies were printed privately in Exeter in 1886.)



Drawing of Acton Court c.1535



Iron Acton in relation to Bristol and the Cotswolds

The Rise and Fall of the Poyntz Family of Iron Acton.

The lives and times of his ancestors give us valuable insights to the character and heritage of the servitor soldier who left such permanent mementos locally. The earliest reference to the ancestors of our County Armagh

branch of the family residing in Iron Acton, South Gloucestershire, dates from around 1155 when **William de Acton** witnessed five charters of Earl William of Gloucester (1147-83). A continuous - though sometimes dubious line in the family tree - can be traced from this twelfth century William de Acton down to Lucas Poyntz (great-grandson of Charles Poyntz of Acton, Co. Armagh) who died c.1707 and who was last to bear the family surname in our area.

Within two hundred years and six generations the estates of the de Acton family had grown significantly, chiefly as a result of the male members of the family choosing wealthy wives, "*This amassing of property by marriage placed the Actons among the most affluent of the Gloucestershire gentry*" (Saul, 226-7). Consequently, **John de Acton** of Iron Acton, c.1288-1362, was born into considerable wealth and comfort. He was distinguished in three respects. (a) He married four times without managing to produce a surviving child. (b) He was excommunicated by the bishop of Bath and Wells for fornication with his mistress, Margaret de Raleigh. (c) In 1321 he joined the rebels during the war against the hated 'Despensers' who were favourites of King Edward II. The king finally managed to crush the rebels at the battle of Boroughbridge, Northern England, in March 1322 and as punishment for having opposed Edward in that battle, John de Acton's lands were confiscated and he spent over a year in prison.

The king himself stayed at Iron Acton in January and February 1324, during which time John alleged that his two houses at Iron Acton and Elkstone were damaged, his trees felled, his corn reaped, his ponds fished and his stock and goods plundered. However, when Edward II was eventually overthrown in 1327, John de Acton regained his lands and was knighted for his trouble.



Tomb slab of Robert Poyntz d. 1439 and his wife Anne

John's failure to produce an heir meant that the estate passed down to his sister's son. Maud de Acton had married Nicholas Lord Poyntz of Curry Mallet, South

Somerset, and their son **John Poyntz** was the first Poyntz to inherit Acton Court. Sir John Poyntz was appointed sheriff of Gloucestershire and later represented the county in Parliament. John Poyntz was succeeded by his son **Robert Poyntz** who was a significant benefactor to the church of James the Less, Iron Acton, having built the church tower and the large stone cross nearby. Visitors to the church can see the tomb slab of Robert depicted in full knight's armour and buried between his two wives Anne and Katherine.



Sir Robert Poyntz 1588-1665

Robert's son Nicholas, grandson John and great-grandson Robert all pursued careers in law.

This latter Robert studied law at Gray's Inn and became king's esquire to Edward IV. He befriended Anthony Woodville, Earl Rivers, the king's brother-in-law and subsequently married the Earl's only child, Margaret. Royals for in-laws proved to be a huge boost to the Poyntzes' fortunes and Robert was soon appointed sheriff of Hampshire. However, in April 1483, fate took an unkind twist when Edward IV died unexpectedly and his brother Richard of Gloucester (soon to become the infamous Richard III) declared his two nephews illegitimate, imprisoned them in the Tower of London and seized the throne. Richard targeted the unpopular Woodville family and had Earl Rivers beheaded at Pontefract prison. As a named executor of the will of Earl Rivers, Robert Poyntz came under suspicion and was removed from several of his more prestigious positions.

When Henry Tudor landed in Wales in August 1485, Robert joined him and, after military victory over Richard III, was knighted on the battlefield of Bosworth. The Poyntz family were now well and truly elevated from local to national history. The new King Henry VII restored Robert to all the prestigious positions he had held under Edward IV and added further appointments including sheriff of Gloucestershire. A year later Henry "*secured the Tudor dynasty by his marriage to Elizabeth of York, eldest daughter of Edward IV and a first cousin of Lady Margaret Poyntz*" (Rodwell & Bell, 21).

The next Royal visit to Iron Acton was more welcome from a Poyntz perspective than that of Edward II had been in 1324. On 23rd May 1486 Henry VII dined with Sir Robert at Iron Acton en route from Gloucester to Bristol. He was to pay another brief visit ten years later in 1496. Robert took a strong naval and commercial interest in the thriving port of Bristol and captained the *Henry of Brystoll*, a hired merchant vessel. Sir Robert Poyntz was appointed a king's knight and his brother Thomas had also joined the royal household, officiating at the christening of Prince Arthur, heir to the throne. The Poyntzes were by now a courtier family. Robert was also a church benefactor and funded the restoration of the Lord Mayor's Chapel, opposite College Green in Bristol city centre, wherein he is buried.

The Poyntz estates continued to expand under the next heir, **Sir Anthony Poyntz**, who was made sheriff of Gloucestershire in 1508 and employed to hire Bristol ships for the king's navy. His first wife Elizabeth Huddesfield nursed Prince Arthur, son of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon for the few months that he lived. When Henry VIII travelled to France to meet Francis I in June 1520 "*his vast and extravagantly-arranged entourage included Sir Robert, Sir Anthony and John Poyntz*" (Rodwell & Bell, 23). In 1522 Henry VIII renewed the war with France and Sir Anthony Poyntz captained the *Santa Maria* as part of the force led by the Earl of Surrey that plundered Picardy. By 1523 he was promoted to vice-admiral with command of a fleet of ten ships on the sea between Wales and Ireland. Sir Anthony's wealth was evident in that he held three houses and his will details his possessions which included tapestries, carved oak chests and chairs from Flanders, a Turkish carpet and velvet-covered cushions, a four-poster bed, silver gilt basin and ewer emblazoned with the Poyntz coat of arms, silver goblets and spoons.

The next master of Iron Acton manor was **Nicholas**, son of Sir Anthony and we are fortunate to have a portrait of him by Hans Holbein the younger which is in the collection of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Nicholas is unrivalled as the most colourful member of the Poyntz family. When Silken Thomas Fitzgerald, 10th Earl

of Kildare revolted in June 1534, Nicholas had a command in Ireland with his uncle Sir John St. Loe and assisted in suppressing the revolt. His reward was to host the king (the third Poyntz to do so) at Iron Acton., when Henry VIII stayed over with his 2nd wife Anne Boleyn in August 1535. When Nicholas became aware of the planned Royal visit he spared no expense in his efforts to impress – he employed 350 labourers for 9 months and restored the East Wing. He hired artisans via the port of Bristol and purchased Venetian glass, Spanish ceramics, Oriel windows, friezes, linenfold panelling and constructed a royal garderobe!



Sir Nicholas Poyntz 1510-1556.

Nicholas was present in the royal court for great state occasions, such as the christening of Prince Edward, born to Henry's 3rd wife, Jane Seymour, and at the reception of Henry's 4th wife Anne of Cleves. However, as many relatives of headless executed victims might testify, the royals could prove very fickle and, in 1541, Nicholas was sent to Fleet Prison in London on a complaint from Lady Anne Berkeley his own sister-in-law! By 1544 he was back in favour as captain of *The Great Galley* naval vessel on a military mission to Scotland, when the king's forces advanced to Edinburgh. Later that same year he participated in the invasion of France where he took Hardelet Castle. Formerly sheriff of Gloucestershire, Nicholas became MP for the county in 1547. The pendulum of fate swung against Nicholas again in October 1551 when he was sent to the Tower of London under suspicion of association with Edward Seymour, 1st Duke of Somerset, Lord Protector of England and eldest brother of the late Queen, Jane Seymour, but he was released after six months.

Nicholas had built a new house on his lands at Ozleworth (about 7 miles south of Iron Acton and just 4 miles east of Bristol) with materials plundered from the demolished Kingswood monastery and with "stones pulled from the crosses in the parishes thereabouts" (Rodwell & Bell, 27). John Aubrey claimed that Nicholas had erected that manor to "keep his whores in" (Aubrey, 251). Nonetheless, at his death aged forty-six he had nine children - six sons and three daughters to his wife Lady Joan, daughter of Thomas 5th Lord Berkeley. In his final will and testament Nicholas made no mention of his spiritual welfare and left nothing to charity – and as Jean Manco observes, his "... robustly independent spirit is perhaps best summed up by the motto he chose for his portrait, 'I obey whom I must, I serve whom I please and I am what I merit'." Arguably Nicholas' tenure at Iron Acton was the zenith of the Poyntz family fortunes for from here onwards their wealth and status would go into decline.

At first glance his son, **Nicholas** the younger's career appeared to follow a similar path to that of his forebears – he was made Knight of the Bath at the coronation of Queen Elizabeth 1st in 1559, served as commissioner of the peace in 1564, acted as sheriff of Gloucestershire in 1570 and represented the county in parliament in 1571. However, these offices carried more kudos than capital. Nicholas was experiencing financial difficulties that forced him to sell off all his lands at Ozleworth except the park around his mother's home at Newark. He was forced to temporarily withdraw from the royal court which may have offended his monarch. When Elizabeth toured England in 1574, she stayed at the nearby Berkeley Castle. Her principal secretary, Sir Francis Walsingham visited Sir Nicholas at Iron Acton but the Queen herself did not.

When Nicholas' first wife died, he improved his financial position with the marriage to Margaret, daughter of the Catholic Edward Stanley, 3rd Earl of Derby. Under Margaret's influence Nicholas became a Catholic, which effectively ended any hopes of reconciliation with his queen. By 1580 his name is found on a list of Catholics who had been imprisoned or put under house arrest. At this stage the Poyntzes harboured a Jesuit priest and were seriously considering moving to Spain, being in constant communication with the Spanish ambassador, Mendoza.

Nicholas converted his deer park at Iron Acton to more profitable agricultural use and contented himself with a low-profile country life. By his death his finances were reduced but stable and he demonstrated greater charity and piety than his father with a £20 donation to the poor and a silver spoon to each of his godchildren with the engraving, 'Godchild, God give thee his grace.' (Rodwell & Bell, 29). His sons to his second marriage eventually all went to Oxford, the first Poyntzes to receive a university education.

The next generation finally brings us to Nicholas the Younger's heir and eldest son **John Poyntz** the father of Charles who founded Acton, Co. Armagh in the early years of the seventeenth century. Having inherited in 1585 at the age of twenty-five, initially it seemed that John's career would again mirror that of his predecessors. He was knighted in 1588, appointed sheriff of Gloucestershire in 1591 and became MP for the county in 1593. In the latter role he was a Privy Councillor and sat on a committee for the relief of maimed soldiers and mariners along with Sir Walter Raleigh. The story is told that Raleigh gave a demonstration on smoking a pipe of tobacco in the park at Iron Acton *'which made the ladies quit it till he had done'* (Aubrey, 181).

Sir John was ambitious and purchased Beverstone Castle (ten miles north east of Iron Acton) in 1597 where he lived for a short while, but he was forced to resell within two years. By the start of the new century John was *"being sued by creditors and for the next twenty years he was intermittently outlawed, imprisoned and generally hounded for debt"* (Rodwell & Bell, 30). By 1614 all Sir John's property had been sold off bar Iron Acton which had been transferred to his son and heir **Robert**. Sir John himself survived until 1633 but his grandson (Robert's son), yet another **John**, would be the last of the Poyntzes to reside at Iron Acton. John's total estimated debt on the occasion of his death in 1680 was a massive £16,000! The extent of the decline in fortune of the family can be seen in the legacies left by two of the residents of the manor at Iron Acton. Previously in 1532 Sir Anthony Poyntz left silver valued at £287 – ultimately in 1680 John left pewter with an estimated worth of £2-5s-0d!

Enigma of the relation between Sir John Poyntz and Charles Poyntz.

Like his ancestor, John de Acton, Sir John Poyntz married four times. Maclean records details of Sir John Poyntz's marriages and his children, *"He first, in 1578, espoused Ursula Sydenham, who died without issue. He married secondly, in February 1581, her kinswoman, Elizabeth Sydenham, by whom he had seven children of whom we know, she died in giving birth to the last on 17th December 1595 Sir John's eldest born child was Dorothy ... the next was Frances, baptized 1st February 1586-7; then followed Robert, his son and heir, baptized 26th October 1588; to him followed Hugh, baptized 14th July 1590; Nicholas, baptized 15th July 1591; Elizabeth ... and John, born and died 2nd December 1595."* (Maclean, 110).

Our obvious difficulty is that among Sir John's children there is no mention of Charles, who was granted 200 acres in Co. Armagh in 1610. We know that, despite their father's financial problems, at least two of Sir John's sons, Robert and Nicholas studied at Oxford

"Robert matriculated at Brasenose in 1605 and must then have paid for his brother Nicholas to study at Magdalen." (Rodwell & Bell, 30). We can only speculate at ways to explain no mention of a Charles among Sir John's children. Charles Poyntz is first mentioned as a young soldier in Ireland, *'Near Scarva there is a spot called Poyntz's Pass, formerly an important military position, which derived its name from its having been forced, after a desperate action, by Lieutenant Poyntz of the English army with a few troops, against a numerous body of Tyrone's soldiers.'* (Maclean, 103). It is clear that the Ulster Plantation grant of 200 acres was made as reward for this military service. Maclean agrees that it is credible that a younger son of Sir John Poyntz might opt for a career in the army and suggests a solution to the enigma, *"Considering the embarrassed circumstances of this gentleman ... it would not have been improbable that one of his sons should seek his fortune in Ireland, which, at the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth, was ... the field of enterprise for the younger sons of the English gentry, where many of them founded opulent families which are flourishing upon the spoils of the unfortunate Irish ... If, however, such were the case with Charles Poyntz, it is surprising that his name should nowhere appear in any family document known in England ... If Charles Poyntz were a son of Sir John, he must have been born of Sir John's second marriage. Charles could not have been born before Robert, or he would have been the heir, nor much later, or he would not have attained an age to have acquired grants of lands in 1610. There was just room for the birth of a child between the birth of Robert, baptized October 1588; and Hugh baptized July 1590; and if Charles Poyntz were the son of Sir John he must, of necessity, have been born between these dates; and, say he was born in July or August 1589, he would have been of a sufficient age to have received a small grant of land in 1610, and nearly thirty years of age when his son Chichester was born"* (Maclean, 109-10).

Given that Charles Poyntz survived until 1661 the calculation by Maclean regarding Charles' age seems reasonable. There are however, other equally speculative but nonetheless possible explanations – were Hugh and Charles perhaps one and the same man? Maybe Hugh Charles by baptism and later known only by his second preferred name? Or did Sir John father Charles out of wedlock to a mistress? If so, this might explain why he received neither education nor inheritance and did not feature among family documents. Whichever the case, Charles Poyntz himself was confident in his claim to descent from Sir John Poyntz of Iron Acton and would appear to have been in contact with his English family relatives to whom he felt loyalty and connection, as is evidenced by the will of his son Tobias who provided *"that in the case of the failure of heirs male his lands,*

&c., should go 'to the heir general of the Poyntz's in England, whose name is now I believe Robert Poyntz in Somerset, being issued of my father Sir Charles Poyntz's eldest brother.'" (Maclean, 105).

Charles Poyntz the Planter c.1589-1661

On 30th November 1610, as part of the Plantation of Ulster, Charles Poyntz, "...this Undertaker, only then for a short time in the servitor class, son of Sir John Poyntz of Acton Gloucestershire" (Hill, 312) was granted 200 acres in Brannock. The location was strategic in its convenience to the ancient pass between the territories of O'Hanlon and Magennis and, as already indicated, Charles Poyntz was familiar with the area having defended the pass against O'Neill's troops. In fact, the figure 200 represents "plantation acres" which were a very crude and generous estimate. The accurate measurement of land (as calculated by Hunter from O.S. maps) received by Poyntz was 674 acres and yet that was small in comparison to the other grantees. Sir Arthur Chichester, having been appointed Lord Deputy in 1605, had divided county Armagh into five baronies – Armagh, Oncilland, Tiranny, Fews and Orior, the latter having been earmarked for plantation of servitors and native Irish. Given that no accurate surveys had yet been undertaken, the guidelines were, that on average, a townland was deemed equivalent to 60 acres. While in good land this could be considerably more, in mountain and wetlands this could be as much as six times greater than the stated allocation of acreage. The table below indicates the main grantees in the barony of Orior along with the figures for "Plantation" acres and the actual measured amount (adapted from Hunter, 284).

GRANTEE	PLANTATION ACRES	ACTUAL ACERAGE	TOWNLAND
Sir Oliver St. John	1,500	4,806	Ballymore
Sir Garrett Moore	1,000	2,681	Knockduff
Francis Cooke	1,000	2,877	Balliclare
Sir Thomas Williams	1,000	2,760	Mullaghglasse
John Bourchier	1,000	3,685	Tawnavaltiny
Lord Audley	500	1,654	Carnshogagh
Capt Henry Atherton	300	1,134	Mountnorris
Charles Poyntz	200	674	Curriator
Marmaduke Whitechurch	120	713	Ballymaedermott

This distribution of land to English and Scottish settlers in the six plantation counties of Armagh, Tyrone, Donegal, Cavan, Fermanagh and Coleraine (later Londonderry) was all made possible with the departure of the Irish Earls in September 1607 in the aftermath of the nine years' war. O'Neill, O'Donnell and Maguire sailed out from Rathmullan, County Donegal in the hopeful expectation that they would be returning with military and financial backing from Spain and the Papacy for renewed warfare. Their vacated territories were now ripe and ready for confiscation and plantation. As Hunter explains, "In that way 'two heads of that hydra of the north' would be cut off, while settlers on the ground would be a source of defence, taxation, and many other changes. Even the reformation would be advanced.

Somewhere in the mix of aims that underlay the formidable decision can be found the contemporary English ideal of 'improvement': land would be used better, society would be more ordered, domestic dwelling would be transformed. 'Civility' would ensue, renewed rebellion in Ulster would be entirely pre-empted and English culture extended into the formerly Gaelic north." (Hunter, 273). Further financial benefits of plantation would be reduction of costly garrison expenses, fresh territories for the expanding populations of England and Scotland and a new market for produce and export. Some native Irish, O'Hanlons, O'Neills, McCanns, O'Hagans etc. did manage to retain some portion of their former territories in the barony of Orior but their grants were significantly smaller – commonly 120 acres. Canning gives interesting statistics for ownership of land in Co. Armagh and Ulster generally in the seventeenth century. "O'Hanlon's territory at the beginning of the seventeenth century would have amounted to 67,925 acres". (Canning, 2001, 71). "After the plantation, 25.2 per cent of the land in the county was owned by natives. By 1641 the amount had fallen to 19 per cent ... by 1688, only 4 per cent of the counties of Ulster, apart from Antrim, was in Catholic hands." (Canning, 2002, 120)

Charles Poyntz was energetic and enthusiastic in fulfilling the conditions of plantation – to "carry out a building programme, both of defensible residences for themselves and of houses in villages for their tenantry, who should be exclusively British – English or Lowland Scots – and whom they must plant at the rate of ten families, notionally twenty-four adult males, per 1,000 'acres'." (Hunter, 274). In the years after the original grant of land regular surveys were conducted to monitor the planters' progress

and apply sustained pressure on them to fulfil the agreed conditions. In 1611 Sir George Carew was able to report that Charles Poyntz had provided timber and materials for building. Maclean updates us for 1616, explaining that by this time Poyntz "... was associated with Sir Arthur Chichester, at which date there is a King's letter authorising Sir Arthur to accept the surrender of the lands of Lieut. Charles Poyntz, held by patent or purchased, and to regrant them to him again in one patent." (Maclean, 102). By 1618-9 Captain Nicholas Pynnar recorded that "upon Lieut. Poynt's lands there is a Bawne of 80 feet square, the lower part thereof to be of stone and clay, with a house in it, but he, not liking of the seat, hath begun a Bawne of 100 feet square with three Flankers and a large house, all which shall be of brick and lyme, which there is

now in the place with workmen labouring very hard and is undertaken to be finished by August." (Maclean, 102).

Poyntz was developing and expanding his estate having purchased lands from the native Irish in the local area and even some as far away as the barony of Oneilland (Hunter, 282). Furthermore, he leased six townlands nearby from the Archbishop of Armagh (Paterson 1960-1, 134). By 1622, 3 Commissioners, Lord Caulfield, Sir Dudley Digges and Sir Nathaniel Riche give details of the circumstances of Charles Poyntz who had "...a fair dwelling house of brick, wherein himself and his family (?) inhabite; and hath an Orchard, Gardens, yarges, & Backsides, inclosed with a Ditch quicksett, besides a Bawne and a stable; And hath provided materials, to build a Bawne of Brick, and hath 8 English Families that dwell in houses, in forme of a Village, near adjoining to the fair Mansion house' (Paterson 1960-1, 116).

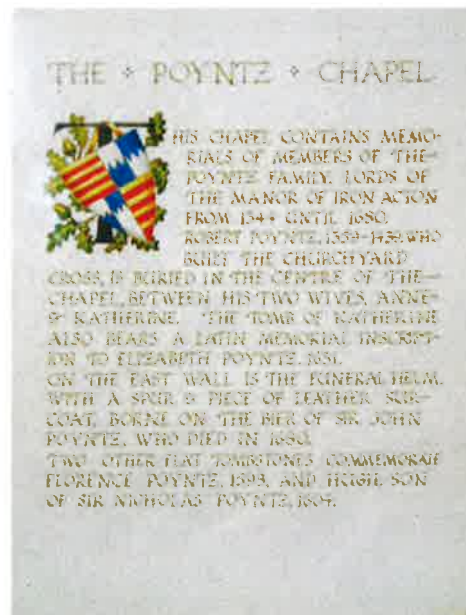
In TGF Paterson's "An Unpublished Early 17th Century Census of the Men and Arms on the Estates of the English and Scottish Settlers in Co. Armagh" which was conducted around 1629, we find the earliest list of the new settlers on the now increased lands of Charles Poyntz, which clearly indicates that by then he had well exceeded the target. In total there were 28 males, 16 of whom bore no arms, 9 of whom had swords, 2 had pikes, 1 had a calliver (a light kind of musket) and none had a musket -

John Browne	Sword only
Walter Scot	Sword only
Thomas Wilson	Sword only
William Wilson	Sword only
John Steward	Pike only
James Steward	Pike only
William Irwin	Calliver only
Christopher Irwin	Sword only
Archball Elliot	Sword only
Richard Browne	Sword only
Owen Powell	Sword only
John Smyth	Sword only
John Irwin	No armes
John Thompson	No armes
William Dod	No armes
John Irwin younger	No armes
Robert Steavensonne	No armies
James Anderson	No armies
Roger Wilkinsonne	No armies
Robert Fryer	No armies
John Richardson	No armies
Archbald Richardson	No armies
Christopher Wilson	No armies
John Taylor	No armies
Richard Cooke	No armies
George Vincent	No armies
William Elliot	No armies
Roger Williamson	No armies

(Paterson, 1970, 411).

This casual attitude to security would seem to indicate that the perceived threat of attack from the dispossessed native Irish had decreased considerably since the plantation was undertaken just under twenty years previously. These tenants, often referred to as West Country Adventurers were multifunctional men – builders, soldiers, farmers – all of whom were in pursuit of land and fresh colonial opportunity in Ireland.

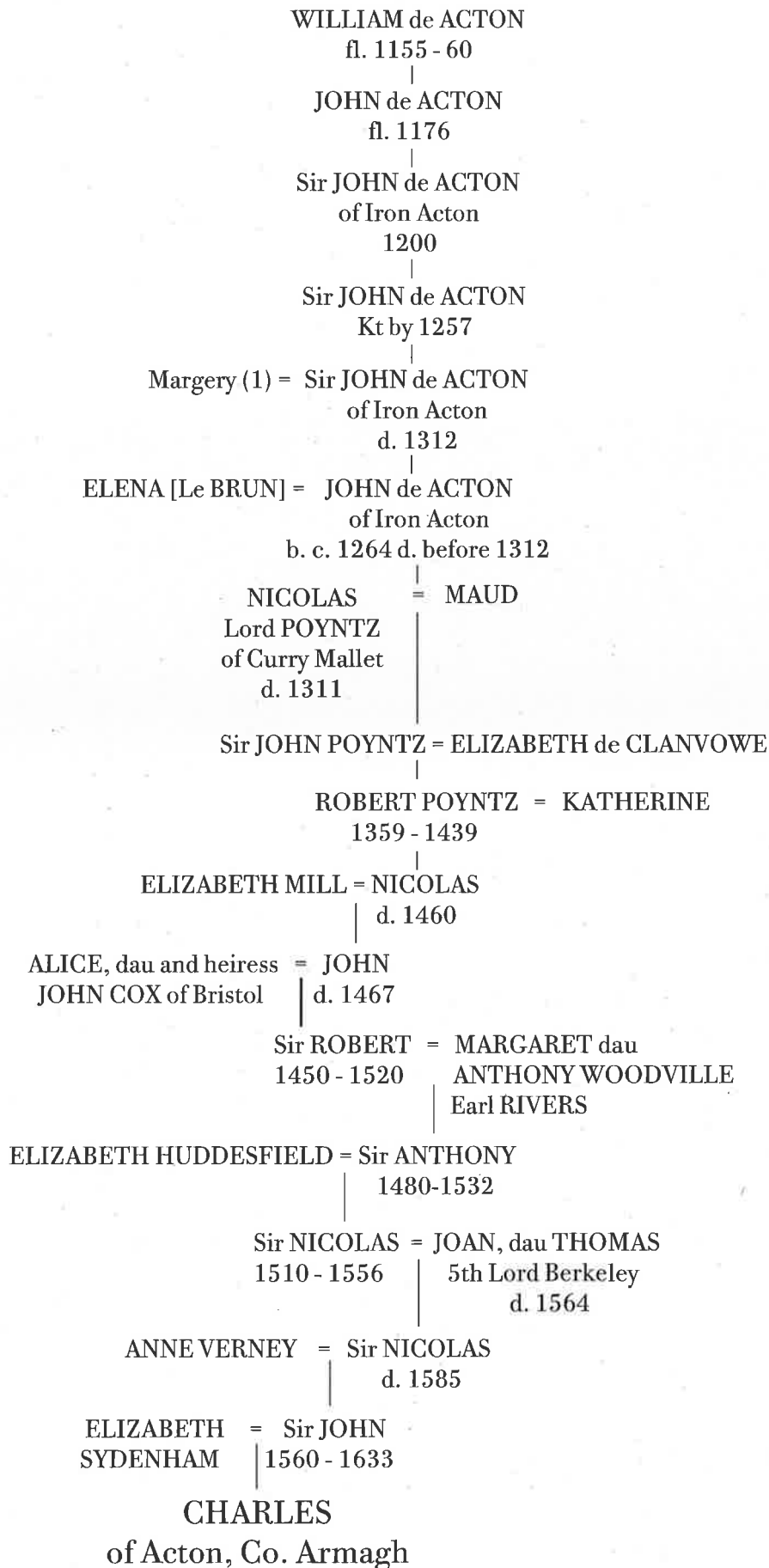
Poyntz was simultaneously advancing his profile as regards his civic and political career and appears on a



Plaque in Poyntz Chapel

list of twelve individuals who were to be appointed by an 'Order to draw forth a fiat of incorporation of the town of Newrye, co. Down, by the name of Provost and Burgesses of Newrye.-Chichester House, 12 Nov. 1612' (CSPI Jas I iv, 299). Following in the tradition of his ancestry in Gloucestershire, he was appointed High Sheriff of Armagh in 1613 (Paterson 1960-1, 135). By the 27th January 1623, 'Sir F. Annesley, Sir Edward Treavor, and Charles Points, Esq.' were appointed to a commission to survey '...the names and number of the Irish that on the 12th Dec. last, or at any time since, were inhabiting upon the several proportions of the British undertakers, their agents, tenants, and farmers, within the county of Armagh, and what rents and other duties and services they or any of them pay, and what quantities of land each of them now holds' (CSPI Jas I v, 483). On 13th June 1630 Charles Poyntz was given 'the honour of knighthood from Adam, Viscount Loftus, Lord Chancellor, and Sir Archibald Boyle, Earl of Cork, then Lord Justices of Ireland' (Maclean, 103/Add. MSS 4784, 202). In the year 1638 he was elected "Member of Parliament for the Borough of Newry, serving for many years in the old Irish House of Commons." (Paterson 1960-1, 135). That completed the trilogy of positions of honour and responsibility borne by so many

POYNTZ
FAMILY
TREE



of his forebears – sheriff, knighthood and M.P. Whatever of the decline in wealth and status of the English branch of the family, the fortunes of the newly founded Poyntz dynasty in Ireland were definitely on the rise. Nonetheless, Charles Poyntz did not escape the turbulent times of 1641 when the native Irish rebelled against the Planters on 22nd October. He was seized by Sir Con Magennis and imprisoned for twenty-seven weeks in the castle at Newry. In a rare document entitled, *“A True Relation of the Chief Passages in Ireland, from 25th April to this present;”* published in London on 14th May 1642 we learn that Newry and Carlingford had been recaptured from the rebels by Lord Conway with the assistance of Robert Munroe (who was later to engage with Eoghan Roe O’Neill at the Battle of Benburb on 6th June 1646). Narrow Water castle was recovered soon after the relief of Newry and Carlingford. Among those set free were *“... the old Viscountess of Evagh, daughter of the old arch-rebel Hugh Earl of Tyrone, Sir Edward Trevor, Sir Charles Poyntz, Captain Henry Smith, and seven others that were taken prisoners ...”* (Maclean, 103).

We can calculate that sometime around 1616, Charles Poyntz had married Christine Puleston, sister of Dame Mary Whitechurch, née Puleston, wife of Sir Marmaduke Whitechurch (see table of Plantation Grantees above) who lived in Loughbrickland (Paterson 1960-1, 135). *“By his will, dated 18th June 1634, Sir Marmaduke made his ‘good brother’ Sir Charles Poyntz trustee, and bequeathed to his ‘dear sister Dame Christine Poyntz, £10, also five marks for a ring,’ and to his ‘nephew Edward youngest son of Sir Charles Poyntz £5 to buy him a nagg to ride upon,”* (Maclean, 104). Christine and Charles had three sons and a daughter Mary who married Francis Lucas of Castleshane, Co. Monaghan. Mary’s children were to become closely connected to the Acton Poyntzes over the following years. Charles Poyntz’s eldest son, Chichester, would appear to have been named out of respect for Sir Arthur Chichester. Chichester Poyntz attended the then recently established Trinity College Dublin from whence he proceeded to matriculate at Oxford on 27th November 1635, aged 17 (Maclean, 104). From causes unknown, Chichester was destined to die soon afterwards. Charles Poyntz died in 1661, intestate, and consequently on 28th May 1661, Tobias Poyntz became heir to his father’s estate. We must assume that the aforementioned youngest son Edward predeceased his father as there is no mention of his having inherited any portion of Charles’ estate.

Tobias Poyntz c1620-1685

Given the birth of his elder brother Chichester around 1618, we may estimate that Toby Poyntz was born around 1620. His career was destined to mirror yet again that of his father and predecessors. As a young man Toby was elected MP for Newry from 1639 to 1641. By 1644 he was Sheriff of Armagh and subsequently High Sheriff of Armagh in 1659, 1664 and 1666. He had military

experience serving on the Royalist side during the Civil war until after the death of Charles I for which service he was granted more lands. In 1662 Toby Poyntz was knighted by none other than his own first cousin, the Duke of Ormonde, son of Elizabeth, sister of Sir Charles Poyntz. Sir Toby married Rose, eldest daughter of Theophilus Buckworth, Bishop of Dromore. Rose was destined to inherit all her father’s lands in Leeah Co. Down in 1652. (Maclean, 104). Rose’s mother, Sarah, was sister to James Ussher the Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland between 1625 and 1656. Sir Toby had made a good match and in addition to adding to his estate was now well connected in the ecclesiastical sense. Sir Toby’s close contacts with these very senior Anglican clerics may have influenced his attitudes. A letter from him to Sir William Flower, Master of the Horse to the Duke of Ormonde, gives an interesting indication of the suspicion in which Sir Toby held his Presbyterian neighbours,

*“Dear Sir,
Acton ye 26 of June 1680*

I should not have troubled you at this time but I see a sort of People in this country hold up their heads very high, the cause I know not unless they expect some Novelties when their ministers come back out of Scotland (for most or all of the Presbyterian ministers are now gone to Scotland to what end I know not); but I could wish that the Council would serve them as we are wont to serve mad dogs – that is when they are out of doors to shut them out...

I am Sir, your most faithful and humble servant Toby Poyntz.”

Not satisfied that he had made his message sufficiently clear he added a postscript, *“The Presbyterians in our Country are very high & sturdie I hope they intend no mischief.”* (Maclean, 105).

Sir Toby was the third prominent Poyntz to be an ecclesiastical benefactor. Perhaps under influence again from his in-laws, he funded the building of a church in his local parish. We discover in Lewis’ Topographical dictionary a reference to the old graveyard and former church near Acton village *“This church was built at the sole expense of Sir Toby Poyntz Knt, the son of Sir Charles Poyntz Knt of Acton anno 1684 and dedicated to the blessed and undivided Trinity”* (Lewis, 7). Sir Toby may have anticipated his death as he survived the completion of the construction of the church by only a year and was buried in a vault under the chancel in 1685. We have already seen the clause in his will dated 1st January 1685 requesting that *“in the case of the failure of heirs male his lands, &c., should go to the heir general of the Poyntz’s in England, whose name is now I believe Robert Poyntz in Somerset, being issued of my father Sir Charles Poyntz’s eldest brother.”* It appears from this that there was now limited communication or contact between the English and Irish cousins of Iron Acton Gloucestershire and Acton village, Co. Armagh. The marriage of Sir Tobias and Rose Buckworth produced three children Charles, Sarah and Christian.

Charles Poyntz c1650-a1707

As in the case of his father, we have no precise information regarding the year of birth of Charles Poyntz junior, but we may estimate a date around 1650-60 when Sir Tobias would have been aged around 30-40. Charles married his first cousin Lucy Lucas, daughter of Francis Lucas of Castleshane Co. Monaghan and of Sir Toby's sister, Mary Poyntz, on 20th December 1684 (Maclean, 108). Paterson gives us two illuminating footnotes in his edition of the 1622 survey; "*The marriage settlement of Charles Poyntz and Lucy Lucas shows that the Poyntz estate had by then become considerably enlarged*" and "*This alliance brought that branch of the Lucas family to Dromantine – lands previously owned by Art Magennis but forfeited in the Civil War and acquired by Sir Hans Hamilton of Hamilton's Bawn in 1662. William Lucas resided at Dromantine but whether as agent or tenant is not quite clear.*" (Paterson 1960-1, 135). Most of what we learn of the life of Charles relates to the relationship which the Poyntz family of Acton had with the O'Hanlon dynasty, former chiefs of Armagh and especially with the famous highwayman Redmond O'Hanlon. Since the turbulent times of the 1641 when on October 22nd the native Irish chiefs rose up against the new Planter class who had come into possession of their forfeited lands, the Poyntzes had carefully managed to avoid direct conflict with their native Irish neighbours. While taken prisoner by Sir Con Magennis in Newry, there are no reports of Charles senior having been maltreated and he was subsequently released unharmed. In his study of the part played by the O'Hanlons in the 1641 uprising, Joseph Canning states that "*In Armagh most of the outrages took place in the north of the county in the barony of Oneilland and in the northern parts of the baronies of Armagh and Tyranny*" and remarks that "*It is puzzling why other and more important properties in the barony (of Orior) e.g. Acton belonging to Sir Charles Poyntz less than four miles south of Tandragee, were not targeted.*" (Canning 2002, 115). Canning explains that "*relations between the settlers in Orior and the O'Hanlons were better than between the newcomers and natives in other parts of Armagh*". A number of clues concerning the ambivalence in the attitude of the Poyntzes to Redmond O'Hanlon emerge from contemporary correspondence. An anonymous letter from a concerned resident at Tandragee to Oliver Herring on 19th December 1679 suggests that neither Sir Toby nor his son Charles were genuine in their efforts to eradicate the threat of Tories from the district. Three months earlier, in September 1679, Henry St. John, proprietor of Tandragee, the ancestral demesne of the O'Hanlons, was murdered. Canning clarifies that "*While Redmond himself was not involved, it is clear that some of his supporters were and the incident focused attention on him.*" (Canning 2002, 123). Not wishing to be identified as conspiring against the Poyntzes, the author asked for his name to be concealed and indeed his signature has been erased from the letter.

This concerned resident of Tandragee writes to Oliver Herring,

"... to acquaint you with the miserable condition this poor country is in by the Tories, so that no man can stir abroad (except he be in league with them) but in danger to be taken or killed. On Thursday last Redmond and two more of the rogues were pursued by two young men, tenants to Madam St. John, who recovered some plundered goods and a horse from them, and the Tories in revenge came about 10 of the clock the same night and set the two young men's father's house on fire, and burnt all his house and corn, and this within a bow's shot of this town that has the name of a garrison. The soldiers here had notice of the Tories being at the poor man's house, and they kept the intelligence at the guard till the Tories were gone, under pretence that he came to betray them. And indeed it could not be otherwise expected from them, having no commanding officer among them since the company came here, and there have not been above two files of them together here this month past. And it's certain the Tories have friends and confederates enlisted in the company. I would not acquaint you with this if I had not very good ground for it. There are lately two or three of Sir Toby Poyntz's servants that have been guilty of several robberies, and some if not all were enlisted in the companies now turned Tories, and one of the men were with the villains that did this mischief here. This morning he came to me and told me he was prisoner with them. I do not write this to reflect on Sir Toby or his son, yet it is the common vogue of the discreetest people here that this country will never be free of thieves as long as the father is in the commission of the peace and the son's company here." (Ormonde MSS V, 1908, 254).

The core messages in this correspondence are clear – Planters fear for their lives and safety, local security measures are inadequate, O'Hanlon's men have infiltrated the military company and the blame is being laid at the door of the Poyntzes. Apparently, for reasons of selfish interest and personal security, the family chose to turn a blind eye and tolerate the activities of Redmond and his gang rather than antagonise them. The letter continues to make this very assertion,

"I have heard very understanding men say that the only way to suppress these skulking scoundrels is to remove the company that is here into some remote place and another company brought whose officers have no interest in this country. The small time Captain Lyndon's company was here, they did good service and would have done more if they had not been removed. And then to have all the passes manned between the counties of Down and Armagh, that is to say, Fathom Castle, Tusker, Poynty's Pass, Scarvagh and Knockbridge." (Ormonde MSS V, 1908, 254-5).

The anonymous author's objective in writing the letter was to ask Oliver Herring to bring the matter to the attention of the Anglican Primate, Archbishop Michael Boyle. He

cleverly implies that the Primate should have a vested interest in the matter,

“And, I am confident that if you acquaint my Lord Primate with this, he is of so generous and public a spirit that he will use his endeavours to have it done. His own revenue by the decay of trade here is much damnified, many hundreds of his tenants being not able to pay their rents, and what is infinitely of more concern to one of his piety and goodness, the whole country will be ruined if he does not. I can assure you we are in so great a consternation that at night we cannot think ourselves secured until the morning, and for my own part since the death of Captain St. John I durst not go a mile from home without a guard, having had several messages sent me from the rogues that killed him that they’ll serve me so too ... I know many who would have acquainted his Grace with these things, but they are really afraid to do it, and were it not that I know your relation and friendship for this good family, I would not have put this confidence in you as to impart this much unto you; so that I hope if you’ll impart anything of what is contained in this letter to any one you’ll conceal my name.” (Ormonde MSS V, 1908, 255).

The terror and paranoia in the correspondence is almost palpable. O’Hanlon was the “scourge” of counties Armagh, Down, Louth, Tyrone, Fermanagh and Monaghan and when the authorities were in hot pursuit he retreated occasionally into Connaught. Redmond rose to prominence as a threat to local security by 1674, “...in December of that year he is named in a proclamation in which he and Loughlin (his kinsman and fellow-highwayman) were given until 1st February to submit or otherwise be treated as outlaws, with a reward being offered to anyone who would hand them over to the authorities.” (Canning 2002, 122). By 1676 another proclamation sought his capture “dead or alive” and two years later he became regarded as “one of the most dangerous ‘rebels’ in Ulster” (Canning 2002, 122). The Ormonde papers contain an account which gives an accurate reflection of the level of prominence to which Redmond had risen,

“You have, I doubt not, seen in the French as well as our Gazettes several relations of a famous rebel named O’Hanlon, by the French called Count Hanlon. This fellow hath been out many years committing great murders, and being a scholar and a man of parts, managed his villainy with such conduct, that he became a formidable enemy, kept two or three counties almost waste, making the peasants pay continual contribution. So terrible was he in the northern parts, that there was no travelling without convoys. In fine, since the general rebellion of Ireland all the tories in this kingdom have not done the mischief this fellow hath done, nor put the army to so much trouble in attending and pursuing, as after him and his party... Various attempts have been made and large rewards offered for bringing in his head ... but all proving unsuccessful.” (Carte, IV, 617-8)

The death of Henry St. John precipitated matters and by 1680 Ormonde, the viceroy, decided to intervene offering £100 (=£10,000 today) for the head of Redmond and £50 for that of Loughlin. Whether through fear of reprisal or loyalty to Redmond nobody appeared to be tempted by the huge reward. It appears that Ormonde developed a new strategy after learning that Redmond was now becoming weary of being a fugitive and was seeking a pardon through the Annesleys of Castlewella as intermediaries. “He (Ormonde) asked a person living in Dublin and well acquainted with the north to find someone from there who was prepared to undertake a secret mission. The person chosen was William Lucas of Drumantine, County Down, who lived close to the border with County Armagh. On 4 March 1681, a commission was granted to him to take action against Redmond. Lucas contacted a certain Art O’Hanlon, a foster-brother of Redmond, who undertook to kill Redmond. Art did not seem to arouse any suspicions in his intended victim. On 25 April with only another tory, William O’Shiel, in the vicinity, Art shot Redmond while he was asleep. The incident happened near Hilltown in County Down. Art received a reward of £200 while Lucas was given a command in the army”. (Canning 2002, 123).

So it came to pass that Charles Poyntz’s own cousin and future brother-in-law William Lucas of Drumantine, got the credit and reward for finally putting an end to the exploits of O’Hanlon, while Charles and his father Sir Toby had to endure allegations of leniency and even conspiracy regarding Redmond. Charles was clearly vexed by how events had turned out and attempted to redress the situation with this in mind he wrote the following letter to Sir William Flower, Master of the Horse to the Duke of Ormonde, just over a week after O’Hanlon’s death:

Acton 3rd May 1681.

*“Honourable Sir,
I hold myself obliged to give you thanks for all your favours, but particularly for your friendly representation of my concerne, in the destruction of that grand rogue, Redmond O’Hanlon, and that you may doe it with the better assurance, I think it will not be improper to give you a particular account of it. About the beginning of December last, Art McColl alias Hanlon, who was onc’t a servant to my father, and at that time had noe staine upon him, but what his surname brought him came to me and desired to be admitted into my companie. I represented to him the unreasonableness of his request, and how that it would give occasion of discourse to those malicious rascals that had scandalised my father and me as having too much kindness for the Hanlons, but withal I told him that he might doe that service, which would serve the King and country, oblige me, and forever make him rich, and then proposed this service, which he has now performed as the way to bring all that to pass; att first he boggled att it, but when I had*

laid doune several ways to him how it might be performed (and all of them depending upon his associating himself with Redmond), he concluded to undertake it, and swore to accomplish it or die in the attempt, upon which I immediately went to Sir Hans Hamilton, gave him an account of what I had done and desired that he would give him a pass and protection to prevent his being kill'd, should he meet with any soldiers, which Sir Hans readily consented to, and having made me write it he signed it, and I delivered it to Artt's owne hand, who then (with many curses on himself if he fail'd) renew'd his promise to me to perform it, and since often by one in whom we both confided sent me word that he continued firm in that resolution, and that not above six days before he did the service how he came after to be concerned with Mr. Lucas I know not, but am extremely glad that on my account the service was done. I am very far from derogateing anything from the merit of Mr. Lucasses service, in which I am persuaded he took much pains, for to most of his designes he made me privie, having first shew'd me my Lord Lieutenant's order to him, neither, I hope, will you think that (had the service been done onely by my meanes) I expected any other reward for the performance of it than that my Lord Lieutenant and you and all good men should see that my endeavours were not wanting for the service of my country in the ruine of that rogue, and all such which I hope, by your means, either is or may yett be brought to pass, onely thus much give me leave to say for myself that had not I in that designe first sent him to associate with Redmund he had not been in a capacitie to have served Mr. Lucas or anybody else. The bearer hereof was by at my agreement with Art, and heard all that I said to him, and alsoe a late agreement that I made with one Fergus Ma Geneiss, who has engaged that William O Sheale, who cut Redmund's head, shall kill Laughlin, and bring his head to me, he may perhaps serve me, as t'other fellow did; but soe the service be done I care not. I hope you will pardon the trouble of this tedious letter, which I thought it my duty you should have from,
Honourable Sir,
Your most obliged and obedient servant,
Char. Poyntz
My father is your servant.

Charles is clear about his involvement and role in the eradication of the O'Hanlon curse. It was he who took the initiative and first struck the bargain with the assassin Art O'Hanlon. It was he who facilitated the strategy when he subsequently arranged with Hans Hamilton for a pass, lest Art be apprehended by the soldiers and prevented from carrying out the task. He offers both Hamilton and the letter bearer as witnesses to his testimony. Charles is clearly hoping to share at least part of the credit and despite his claims to the contrary, maybe even some financial compensation for the operation. It must have frustrated him that Art O'Hanlon, the former Tory turned traitor, got £200 and cousin William Lucas a military promotion. While it appears that Charles got no public

recognition for his role in ridding the region of its most famous outlaw, it may well be that he was targeted by Redmond O'Hanlon's associates in a revenge attack for he was shot, "at Portaferry, but in what circumstances we have not been able to ascertain..." (Maclean, 108). Captain Charles survived the shooting but in a letter from Ormonde to the Earl of Arran dated June 3rd 1684 and only six months before the death of Sir Toby, we learn that he was planning to abandon his military career,

"I had a letter from old Sir Toby Poyntz to give his son leave to sell his company, which I think the father gave him. As I remember the young man is slightly enough. I know not what is in him, but I should think him not very wise if the proposition was with his consent. If the father had kept the company till now though he bought it not, yet his long service and great age might have been an inducement to let him sell it. But if you give that liberty to the son he must not look for another command in haste, unless he buys it from one that has some kind of pretence to sell. I wish he may know this."
 (Ormonde MSS VII, 1912, 240).

Ormonde was clearly reluctant to give his agreement to Charles' proposal but we have no further evidence to confirm whether or not the sale of the company proceeded. However, six months later, on 20th December 1684 Charles married Lucy Lucas and four years after that, his only child and heir, Lucas, was born in 1688. It is possible that the father was still alive when "Lucas matriculated at Trinity College, Dublin, in 1704, as the son of Charles Poyntz, aged sixteen years." (Maclean, 108). He certainly had died before 1707 by which time his widow Lucy had remarried and was now Lucy Savage. Charles Poyntz died intestate, and "on 12th July 1712, administration of his effects was granted to Edward Lucas, of Shane Castle" (Maclean, 108).

Lucas Poyntz 1688-1707?

Charles Poyntz the elder, founder and first resident of Brannock Manor, Acton, had lived well into his seventies. His son Tobias had reached his mid-sixties. Perhaps as a result of injuries from his having been shot, Charles the younger's lifespan was shorter than that of his father by at least one decade. The fourth and final generation of the family to bear the name may not have reached his twentieth year. Presumably in view of his deteriorating health, Lucas Poyntz, "made his will on 2nd April 1707, in which he names his mother, Lucy Savage, and makes bequests to Lieutenant Robert Lucas and Francis Lucas, the latter of whom he appoints his executor. By the death of Lucas Poyntz, the issue of Sir Charles Poyntz in the male line became extinct, and by the will of Sir Toby Poyntz it would appear that the estates should have devolved upon the heir general of Sir John Poyntz of Iron Acton, the only remaining representatives of Sir Charles Poyntz being Sarah and Christian, daughters of Sir Toby, nevertheless these ladies inherited." (Maclean, 108).

It seems to have proven fortuitous for Sarah and Christian that communications between the English and Irish branches of the Poyntz family had now lapsed. The estate was divided equally between the sisters. "*Sarah, the elder, married Col. Charles Stewart of Ballintoy Castle, Co. Antrim ... Christian, the younger, daughter and coheir, married in 1686 Roger Hall of Mount Hall, Co. Down*" (Maclean, 109). A period of just under a century had passed from 1610 when Sir Charles the Planter was first granted lands in Brannock until 1707, when his great-grandson made his will. By now the fortunes of both the English and Irish branches of the Poyntz family had gone into decline.

Sarah Poyntz and her husband Charles Stewart purchased Christian Hall's portion of the Acton estate and so the property passed into the Stewart name. Three generations later in the 1790's, Thomas Alexander Stewart junior, Sarah Poyntz's great-great-grandson was responsible for the establishment of Poyntzpass. Because of his involvement in the United Irishmen he was imprisoned and lost the property. When he died in 1800 the last direct link with Charles Poyntz had gone.

An inscription, taken from a 15th century Vatican manuscript, and written on the wall of Iron Acton Manor in Gloucestershire is a solemn reminder of the nature of human existence:

"Man may avoid that wretched jest by which he lost paradise, through care always to consider the future. No one remains for long on the peak, but swiftly passes on. All things will pass on, we will pass, you will pass, they will pass".



Iron Acton Parish Church

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