The History of the Graves Family and Mickleton Manor

By Geoff Field (January 2026)

Introduction

In 2023 Brin Kibblewhite and I, volunteers with the Mickleton Community Archive, were contacted by two American tourists – Rod and Isabel Graves, from Luray, Virginia – who were in the UK and wanted to learn about Rod's family links to Mickleton. He wasn't the first of the American Graves family to visit, in fact there's actually a Graves Family Association in the USA and in 1995 a group came over to visit and were treated to tea parties on the lawn of Mickleton Manor.

After showing Rod and Isabel round the village, we visited the church, where they were fascinated to see their family crest on the escutcheons in the North wall and the marble memorial plaques giving some of the Graves family history. Living in Old Manor Gardens, inside the former boundary of the Manor, I had always been curious about the history of the Manor and the Graves family and so decided to undertake some research and present a talk to the Mickleton Society.

There had been many versions of the history of our village – Mickleton Women's Institute won an award in 1957 for their book "The Story of Our Village 1857 - 1957" and resident Chris Knight had written many pages which he called "a Mickleton Miscellany" which were published on the Society's website. There were also many historical items on the Mickleton Community Archive website and John Kilbey, Secretary of the Mickleton Society had written some historical articles for the Mickleton Magazine.

The words written in 1957 by Margaret Darvill, the doyen of the WI and incidentally, a founder of the Mickleton Society, gave a stark warning:

> *"Before the history of the past hundred years can be written, the sources must be found. We have done no more than make a start — in fact by the end we appear to have more to follow up than when we began — but we hope we have inspired a wish to search for more information to fill the gaps in our story, and have underlined the importance of preserving records of events as they take place."*

Of course research nowadays is much aided by the internet and although there is no doubt a lot of related information sitting in Gloucester Archives, I'm not one for sifting through old documents, although if time allows I may feel it helpful.

I started my research with Eynsham Abbey who owned the Manor of Mickleton from the 11th century until the Reformation in 1538.

Eynsham Abbey and the Manor of Mickleton

It was King Aethelred the Unready, who founded a Benedictine Abbey at Eynsham, between Witney and Oxford in 1005. He expressed a desire *"to appease God with a never-ending display of good works because of the perilous times occasioned by the most savage assault of the rampaging barbarous enemies…afflicting us almost to the point of extinction."* He was referring to the Danes, who controlled much of Eastern England and to whom he was forced into paying ransom money – Danegeld.

Over the next 500 years his abbey at Eynsham would control much of south eastern England. In the 11th century the Abbot was Aelfric, whose patron Aethelmaer endowed the abbey with the manor of Eynsham, as well as the church of St Ebbe's in Oxford, two mills and several further properties in Oxford to provide the monks with rental income. In addition, he granted more distant lands including the manors of Mickleton, Marlcliff on the River Avon near Bidford, Bentley near Redditch,

Esher and Ditton in Surrey and Rye in Sussex, lands totalling some 14,000 acres. But by the 16th century the fortune of the abbey began to wane. People increasingly gave estates and gifts to parish churches rather than the monasteries. Monks were often seen as unworthy of respect. An Inspection by the Bishop of Lincoln had accused the Eynsham monks of spending their time drinking and gambling in the village and neglecting their holy responsibilities. For over 500 years the huge structure had dominated the village of Eynsham and the surrounding countryside, towering over the local farms and cottages.


EYNSHAM ABBEY RECONSTRUCTION
cover illustration for 'The Lost Abbey of Eynsham' - Photo © Peter Lorimer for Eynsham Parish Council

Henry VIII's decision to dissolve the monasteries and plunder their wealth meant that in December 1538, Eynsham Abbey was surrendered to the Crown, gradually demolished and its stone walls pillaged so that now nothing remains above ground.

Richard Porter

44 years earlier, in 1494, the Abbot had leased the Manor and Rectory of Mickleton to one Richard Porter for a term of sixty years at an annual rent of £80 4s and Henry VIII agreed to honour the lease previously granted by the Abbot. This may have been because 25 years earlier Richard's son, William, had been Sergeant at Arms to a young Henry VIII and, on 31 May 1515, William had written a hasty will as he was about to "set off for the Wars" – presumably with the French – making provision for his wife, Margaret and children. An extract from his will reads as follows:

> *"And if it please god to call some of my children afor that tyme it is my mynde that the eldest alwaye shulde succeed my father and me in landes leses and the farme of mykylton (Mickleton) that my Father wyll leve hym. And my second sonne to have the farme of Byryton (Berrington in Chipping Campden)."*

In the event 35 year old William died just six months after making his will – not in a battle with the French but in a fight with a 26 year old upstart called George Throckmorton from Coughton Court, near Alcester. The fight had actually taken place in the City of London - in Foster Lane – now the home of Goldsmiths' Hall. Throckmorton was eventually acquitted, claiming that Porter was the aggressor and that he had acted in self-defence. The subject of their quarrel remains a mystery.

William's father Richard Porter was a resident of Chipping Campden and probably never lived in Mickleton, but he may have started the construction of the present manor house and his descendants certainly did live in Mickleton. His great great grandson, Endymion Porter, was born in Mickleton Manor in 1587 and the Porter family also built the fine manor house at Aston Sub Edge, which shares an architectural style.


Mickleton Manor


Aston Manor

We mainly remember Richard Porter for the charity he created in 1513 with a gift of land in Mickleton, the rents from which were to be employed by the Trustees in repairing the church - with any surplus going to other pious and charitable causes. Following the enclosure of Mickleton's common land in 1613 the income grew substantially and by 1828 the Richard Porter Trust was generating a surplus of £170 a year, supporting the church, school and schoolmaster's house, plus the parish officers, a clerk and sexton. Nowadays his charity generates income of £60k a year for the village.

As a tenant of the Abbot he would have had responsibility for repairs and upkeep of the parish church and it has been suggested that this may in fact have been a way of limiting his liability. Anyway, five hundred years later our village is very grateful to him.

Sir Edward Fisher

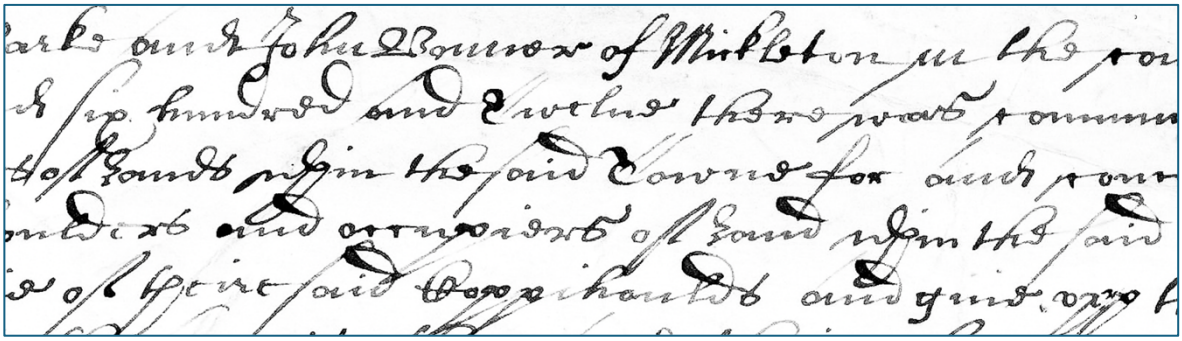
By 1571 the leasehold title of the Manor had become so complicated that an arbitrator had to settle the rival claims of the Porter and Harwarde families and in 1591 the lease was surrendered to the Crown. The whole manor was then sold freehold in quick succession to Lord Lumley, Sir Edward Grevill and then to Sir Edward Fisher. John Kilbey wrote in the Mickleton Magazine that in 1607 Fisher had married Mary Chaloner the daughter of Sir Thomas Chaloner, whom James I had appointed governor and chamberlain of his son and heir, Henry, Prince of Wales. However, in 1612 Henry died of typhoid at the age of 19 and King James was succeeded by his second son, Charles I, whose reign ended in Civil War and the Commonwealth. It could all have been very different for Mickleton, as we will soon learn.

Sir Edward Fisher was a beneficiary of the Enclosure Acts which gave him title to what previously had been open fields and common land. However, he was considered a rogue by the poor of Mickleton for failing to provide (as was required by the Acts) for what then became the landless poor and in a colourful incident from midsummer 1636, Sir Edward encountered a yeoman of Mickleton by the name of Edmund Perkes, who was in a rather angry and inebriated state in the Spread Eagle public house at Gloucester. Perkes called Sir Edward:

> *'a vagrant knight and noe gentleman, and that he* (Edmund Perkes) *was as good a gentleman as Sir Edward Fisher, and that he cared not a fart nor a turd for him, and that Sir Edward Fisher was a madd man, and that neither his word nor his oath would be taken for threepence'.*

Sir Edward sued Perkes for his libellous language "likely to provoke a duel" and despite depositions by several notable witnesses (possibly in the pay of Sir Edward) no record can be found of the outcome of the case, which was due to be heard in February 1638.

However, later that year Fisher was himself sued by the Poor of Mickleton and early excitement that a copy of the judgement could be purchased from the National Archives soon evaporated when it transpired that it wasn't a transcript but an image of the judgement written in medieval English a sheet of vellum, and so far we have been unable to decipher it.



Possibly as a result of the judgement, Sir Edward's finances eventually lapsed into a parlous state and when he died in 1654 the Manor passed to his son who, to free himself of his father's debts, sold it to a wealthy London lawyer - one Richard Graves - whose descendants would enjoy continuous ownership of the Manor and endow the village with a calm, scholarly and benevolent life for the next 300 years.

The Graves Family

So this is where our tale really begins – with the Graves family. Family histories are almost always written by descendants and the Graves are no exception. John Card Graves of the Buffalo Historical Society was the first to research the family in 1896 and published his book of over 600 pages, which, fortunately for us, is mostly devoted to the legions of American Graves – not all of whom are descended from Mickleton.

As a very proud Yorkshireman I'm happy to reveal that the Graves family claim their ancestry from a distinguished Yorkshire family descended from Norman knights who had settled in Cleckheaton, West Yorkshire, and in 1591 James and John Graves of Cleckheaton applied to the College of Arms in London and were granted a coat of arms.

Two years later, in 1593, at the age of 80, a certain John Grave, of the village of Beamsley on the southern edge of the Yorkshire Dales, was visiting his son in London. He decided to stay in London and was there until his death from smallpox in 1616 at the astonishing age of 103 - just after having his portrait painted.



He was hastily buried in St Martins Church, Ludgate Hill, but his first name was not recorded and his surname was given as Grave, not Graves. His descent from the Graves of Cleckheaton is claimed as follows:

John Graves, Cleckheaton 1461 – 1483
Robert Graves, Cleckheaton 1485 - 1509
John Grave, Beamsley 1513 - 1616

Richard Graves "the Haberdasher"

John Card Graves, wrote that the son John Grave was visiting was Richard Graves, born in 1572, who in 1593 was serving an apprenticeship in London as a haberdasher, but no record of Richard's birth has been found either in Yorkshire or elsewhere and it is not clear to me why a young man, apparently without family in London, would travel to the capital to pursue an apprenticeship as a haberdasher, or indeed whether an apprentice would be able to support or even host an ageing father.

However, the Worshipful Company of Haberdashers have provided evidence that Richard Graves completed his apprenticeship in 1596, when he became a time served Freeman of the Company after which he reportedly went on to acquire substantial wealth and property, including three taverns: The Ship, The Dogges Head and The Chequers in the parishes of St Martin's and St Bride's (Fleet Street).

He had two sons: William (born in 1601) and Richard, born nine years later in 1610. William became a soldier and Richard a lawyer.

William Graves "the soldier"

William Graves rose to become a Colonel commanding a regiment of horse in Cromwell's Parliamentary Army. in 1647 he volunteered to serve in Ireland and in 1649 he was sent to quell the uprisings of Catholics and Royalists in Ireland, including the infamous Siege of Drogheda when Cromwell issued his troops with the "no quarter" command – meaning that no mercy should be shown. The governor of Drogheda, Sir Arthur Aston, was confident that his walls could not be breached but when they were the entire garrison was slaughtered. Cromwell employed the same tactics at Wexford and Clonmel.

William Graves was rewarded with lands in Ballymack and Burnchurch, Co. Kilkenny. Although William later returned to England, he left two of his sons in Ireland. One, James, settled in the north, and from him the family of Lord Graves is said to have descended. The other, Henry, settled near Limerick, in the south. From these two sons descended a family of noted naval commanders, theologians, academics and poets. More of them later.

Richard Graves "the lawyer"

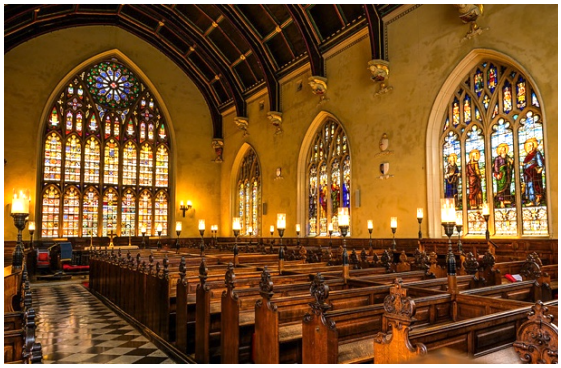
For Richard Graves the lawyer these were turbulent times – the first Civil War from 1642 – 1646, the rise of Cromwell, the execution of Charles I in 1649 and the 10 years when England was a republic meant that many legal cases had to be tried – and Richard was in his element with a number of important and highly remunerative public posts:

- in 1644 he was on a committee for raising volunteers for the defence of Middlesex;
- in 1645 Clerk of the parliamentary commission for raising money;
- in 1646 High Collector of tax assessments in Middlesex;
- in 1647 Member of a committee for the militia of Westminster;
- in 1650 Counsel to the trustees for the sale of forfeited estates;
- in 1655 Counsel-at-law practising before the Committee for Compounding and afterwards Clerk of the Peace and Receiver-General for Middlesex.

In recognition of his status in the legal community he was elected a bencher of Lincoln's Inn – in other words a board member – and as such was entitled to place his coat of arms in the stained glass window of Lincoln's Inn Chapel which I visited last summer.



The Chapel, Lincoln's Inn



Interior of the Chapel, window far right

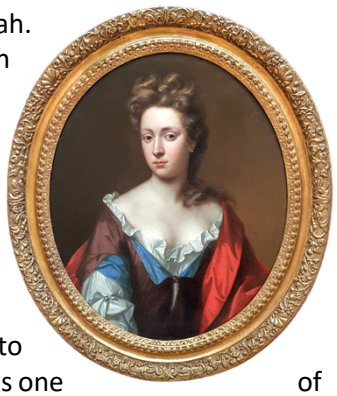
But whether he had the title to the coat of arms he placed in the window (pictured right) is a question to which I shall return.



It was said that to be recognised as a Gentleman in the 17th century you were expected to have the means to enjoy life without work, to own land and to possess or inherit a coat of arms, hence the saying that "the King can make a Lord but not a Gentleman".

Well, Richard Graves the lawyer had accumulated the wealth with which he was able to buy the Manors of Aston Subedge and Weston Subedge in 1654 and then the Manor of Mickleton in 1656. He continued to practise law in London and it is not thought that he ever lived in Mickleton, perhaps intending to retire to the country - but he died in 1660. He had married twice, fathering 13 daughters and six sons, but only one son, Samuel, born in 1649, survived to inherit the Manor.

Samuel Graves



Unlike his father, Samuel did settle in Mickleton, with his wife Susannah. His son, another Richard, was born in 1677 and married Elizabeth Morgan, possibly pictured here in a painting dated 1695 and entitled "A Lady of the Graves Family". The painting once hung in the ante room at Kiftsgate Court and is now in the National Portrait Gallery in London.

Richard Graves - "the antiquarian"

We will refer to Richard as "the antiquarian" because of his passion for the study of historical artefacts and he was probably the first to settle into the life of a country gentleman. His friend Thomas Hearne wrote "He was one of the most worthy and virtuous gentlemen….. a man of great modesty and of a most sweet temper, and a great friend to his tenants and to the poor."

Richard and Elizabeth had four sons and two daughters and it is said that he was content to enjoy a quiet life in the country. One of his sons penned this poem about life in Mickleton:

... here those ancestors - a virtuous train!
In health contented dwelt, thro' many a reign.
Each country seat was then a well-stor'd farm,
Which knew no beauties but in snug and warm.
Pleas'd, round their barns they heard their oxen lowe,
And the same steeds then drew the coach and plough.
Strangers to form, their neighbour was their guest,
Where mirth and rural plenty made the feast:
Nor hyson (tea) *yet, nor Gallic wines were known,*
Nor deem'd polite the annual jaunt to town.
While summers thus, and cheerful winters pass'd,
They liv'd thrice happy ...



It was Richard the antiquarian who would have commissioned mapmakers to draw up the first known map of the village, a copy of which I purchased from the British Library. This is just the central portion of the map. The numbered properties probably relate to his tenants in the village (who are listed on the map) and although a rather crude image, this is the first representation of the Manor House, with the Parish Church behind it.

Richard clearly also knew that seventy years earlier, his grandfather Richard had placed a coat of arms in the chapel window at Lincoln's Inn - his father Samuel had put the same coat of arms on the family's silverware and furniture and probably also in the parish church of St Lawrence, but he obviously had doubts about their entitlement to do so.

This is evidenced by an approach he made in 1728 to the College of Arms in London to have the Graves Coat of Arms awarded to his family. The heralds at the College of Arms told him that his request would fail unless he could prove that the 103 year old John Graves was of the same family line as the Graves family of Cleckheaton, to whom they had granted the original coat of arms in 1591. This they were unable to do as there were no parish records for Beamsley before 1612 and none for Cleckheaton before 1558.

In the event they turned down Richard's request but granted an amended coat of arms to be used by Richard, his father Samuel and their descendants, as follows:

Gules an Eagle displai'd, Or, Beaked, membred and Crowned Argent between eight Cross Crosslets of the second and for the Crest on a wreath of the Colours a Demy Eagle erased, Or, issuing out of a Ducal Coronet haveing a Cross Croslet in his Beak



An undated escutcheon in the parish church appears to show this amended version of the Arms with the eight cross crosslets, but without the crosslet in his Beak (although this does appear in some later versions and the crown should have been silver, not gold).

So the coat of arms in Lincoln's Inn might not have been legitimate, but no doubt Richard the antiquarian was happy that he had squared the circle and secured his gentleman's entitlement to a coat of arms.

Richard's wife Elizabeth predeceased him in 1723 and he died in 1729 at the age of 59, leaving six children, five in the care of his eldest son, Morgan Graves – now just 20 and a student at Oxford.

Morgan's siblings were: Mary 16, Richard 14, Charles 12, Elizabeth 6 and Danvers 3.

Morgan Graves (1707– 1770)

Morgan's father had died intestate and to support his young siblings Morgan decided to sell his father's collection of antiquities – coins, books, manuscripts etc, and then mortgaged part of the estate to support his siblings. He went on the become a successful lawyer – like his grandfather and great-grandfather - also becoming a bencher at Lincoln's Inn. We'll come back to Morgan but first let's have a look at his siblings – possibly the most interesting generation of the Graves family.

Mary, Elizabeth and Charles Graves

Elizabeth died at just seven years of age, a year after her father's death, but Mary grew up to marry a clergyman, John Taylor. (n.b. Elizabeth and Mary are not shown in the family tree at the end of this paper, simply for lack of space). Charles became vicar of Tissington in Derbyshire and the youngest son, Danvers, went on to pursue a career with the East India Company.

Danvers Graves (1717 – 1752)



The youngest of his generation, Danvers Graves had lost both his parents by the time he was twelve. Born in 1717, we presume he enjoyed his primary education in Mickleton in the schoolroom above the church entrance, but he went on to pursue a career with the East India Company which sent him to work for them in Persia. Little is known of his life but I found a PhD thesis by Peter Good who had researched the role of the East India Company in Persia and the following account is distilled from his book.

Graves was based initially at Bandar Abbas on the Straits of Hormuz. At this time the Persian Gulf was a hotbed of trade in silk, spices, wine, wool, copper and an unimaginable array of goods, fought over by naval forces – the British having defeated the Portuguese navy a century earlier to take control of shipping in the Gulf.

In 1747, however, Nader Shah was the ruler of Persia and the ancient city of Kerman was in flames. The population had suffered weeks of dreadful violence and looting by the Shah's troops, who wrought vengeance on the merchants of the city who had tried to avoid paying vast sums of money to the Shah to fund his military campaigns, with many being severely beaten or murdered.

Amidst all of this chaos, Danvers Graves, at the age of just 27, had been dispatched by the East India Company to oversee their business in Kerman, with responsibility for lucrative contracts for the purchase of wool and copper, overseeing a daily list of purchases, payments and supply contracts. Graves witnessed the almost complete destruction of Kerman and reported to his superiors how the Shah had ordered the executions of prominent citizens, the seizure of property and wholesale destruction of any who resisted him.

The East India Company had withdrawn most of their staff from Persia but Graves was faced with an army on his doorstep. His household servants were destitute and had taken shelter with him, while his local translator had robbed him before fleeing the city. Rather than fleeing himself, Graves stayed to protect the interests of his employers, their local assets and the lives of his employees. After failing to secure an audience with the Shah through the proper channels, Graves tried a final, risky gambit: He walked through the ruined city to the compound occupied by the Shah and after being turned away by guards and officials, Graves saw the Shah walking nearby. He decided that the only way he would be able to speak to the Shah was by attracting his attention directly. Graves began arguing loudly with the guards and officials, which had the desired effect; the Shah ordered that Graves be allowed entry and granted him an audience. Graves succeeded in persuading the Shah that the Company's exaggerated debts be paid in bills of exchange, rather than the hard cash the Shah had demanded.

The Company's headquarters in Kerman then came under attack but Graves saved his staff and servants by presenting the Shah's troops with a writ of protection granted by the Shah himself. The threats and extortions continued but ended with the Shah's assassination at the hands of his own commanders; the ensuing chaos gave Graves enough time to save himself and his servants. He was rewarded by being appointed, at the tender age of 31, as the East India Company's agent for the whole of Persia but just a year later, in 1752, he died of a fever in Bandar Abbas. A very brave young man of whom, until now, we had little knowledge.

Richard Graves "the writer" (1715 – 1804)

Second son Richard was possibly the most renowned of the four brothers. He was born in Mickleton in 1715, the third of six siblings. His early education was in the village school run by the curate of the parish, William Smith, who taught the young Richard classics at the age of twelve. It's reasonable to assume that the schoolroom was the same one you can see over the porch to St Lawrence's Parish Church. At school, young Richard formed a lifelong attachment to the curate's daughter, Utrecia Smith but more of her later. At 13, just a year before his father died, Richard was sent to boarding school in Abingdon and then, in 1732 he commenced his studies at Pembroke College in Oxford.

He settled into academic life, dabbled with various cliques – *"students of Greek who read ancient texts and drank water"*, then with a group he described as *"West Country lads - a set of jolly, sprightly young fellows, who drank ale, smoked tobacco and sang bacchanalian songs the whole evening."* Then he took up with two former Abingdon pupils *"who taught him to drink port and claret"* - but Graves was sensible enough to know he couldn't afford their lifestyle.

Then he met two genteel young men – William Shenstone from Solihull and Anthony Whistler from Eton. The three became lifelong friends, at Oxford they met almost daily, sharing poetry and the arts, and although Shenstone and Whistler did nothing so vulgar as take a degree, Richard Graves successfully took his degree in 1736, accepted a fellowship in the Oxford College of All Souls and looked forward to what he called *"a bright career in learning."*

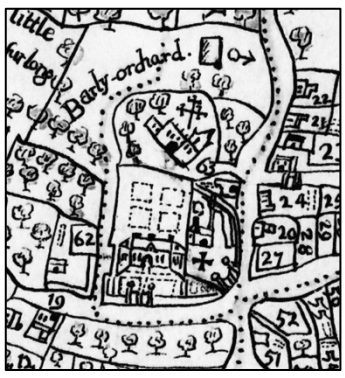
William Shenstone (1714 - 1763)

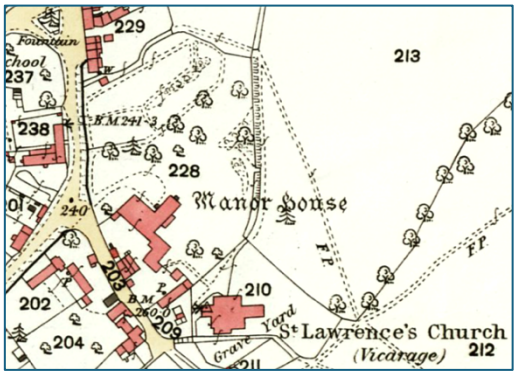
During this period England was beginning to embrace a new style of gardening - moving away from the formal, geometric parterres, flower beds and clipped topiary favoured by William & Mary and Louis XIV, in favour of a new idea of placing winding paths around the estate with informal beds of shrubs, trees and fields – a more natural style suited to small estates, where ornamental planting and fruit and vegetable cultivation could be integrated with grottoes and statuary. This new Georgian style of gardening became known as Ferme Ornée.

After Oxford, Shenstone returned to life in the country, inheriting from his mother's family a farm called the Leasowes in Halesowen. Not a wealthy man, Shenstone lived simply, devoting himself to writing, poetry and letters, corresponding throughout his life with Richard Graves. He became almost reclusive, never married but is celebrated for creating at the Leasowes a Ferme Ornée, which became an attraction for the rich and elegant, who travelled from afar to stroll it's paths amid the fields, trees, waterfalls and ponds Shesntone created. One biographer writes of the Leasowes, "it is probable that nothing contributed so effectively to give him a sense of power, to subdue his feeling of social inferiority. He tended it like a child, was hungry for praise of it, and, when praise came, thirsted for the credit due to his ingenuity."

Nowadays you can still see the structure of the Leasowes estate, which is Grade I Listed on English Heritage's Register of Parks and Gardens and the home of the Halesowen Golf Club.

Several biographers of Shenstone tell us, however, that he took his inspiration from an earlier visit to Mickleton Manor where Morgan Graves had carried out some improvements to his garden based on ideas passed to him by a relative, Thomas Morgan, who had visited the Ferme Ornée created by Phillip Southcote at Woburn near Chertsey. Southcote had displayed his estate by planning a 'belt' to encircle an area of farmland, out of cultivation, part of It wooded, with valleys of rivulets, and through It ran a path diversified with grottoes and other devices, with views across the land within the circumference of the path, and also over the adjoining countryside. We can assume that if there was an ornamental parterre, as suggested by the 1698 map, it was Morgan who removed it.





Perhaps we can see some of this style on old maps such as this one with the footpaths following the manor wall and winding through the gardens, but this part of the Manor was sold in the 1980s for a housing development - Old Manor Gardens. Morgan also left us with a feature we can all enjoy today – the Ha Ha which allows us to see the manor from the church fields and of course the residents of the Manor to admire the view across to Kiftsgate and Hidcote without a wall or a fence. Not far from the manor is also the copse which once featured a statue of a Roman Centurion, now long disappeared from view, its fate unknown although grade II listed by Historic England in 1985.

It was therefore at Mickleton Manor that Shenstone got the ideas which made the Leasowes such a celebrated venue. Shenstone is also credited with persuading Morgan Graves to plant the scots pines at the top of the escarpment, the line of lime trees which marks the boundary between Warwickshire and Gloucestershire and creating the elm avenue from the church field towards what would become Kiftsgate. This avenue was felled in the seventies due to Dutch Elm disease. However, none of these features appear to conform to the "natural" style of gardening which Shenstone and Graves had espoused.



In 1743 Shenstone wrote to Richard Graves "I called yesterday at Mickleton, saw the portico and snapped up a bit of mutton at your brother's." Although we don't know the exact date the portico was added to the Manor House, it seems that it must have been around 1743 when Shenstone first saw it and that it was a great talking point.

By now Richard's elder brother, Morgan Graves, was a successful lawyer and an eligible bachelor and the much enlarged Mickleton Manor became the rendezvous for the young people of the area. Shenstone wrote of one of the young ladies *"She flirted outrageously with all of the men. She sang, danc'd, laughed and romp'd and came hop-stride-and-jump into one's affections"* - but she failed to make an impression on Shenstone, who was much more attracted to Utrecia, the curate's daughter and then to Richard and Morgan's sister, Mary Graves.

Richard Graves and Shenstone spent a happy summer together at the Manor and Shenstone later wrote *"There is no place at which I have spent more agreeable hours than Mickleton."*

Utrecia Smith (17?? - 1745)

Utrecia's date of birth is unknown but she would have come to Mickleton when Richard was three or four years of age when her father, William Smith, was appointed curate at the Parish Church of St Lawrence. As they grew up together they became imperceptibly closer but when Richard went to boarding school and then to Oxford, the only times they would have met was in the holidays. Utrecia had been given a good education by her father and was described as "intelligent, well educated, unaffected, kindly and gracious."



Unlike other young women, she was not afraid to voice her opinions in mixed company. She captivated Graves and Shenstone and was the life and soul of Mickleton when these two impressionable young men spent their summers here. Perhaps Richard flirted with the idea of marrying her but probably the gap in their social standing held him back and both Graves and Shenstone were distraught when she died of smallpox on 5th March 1745, still in her twenties.

Richard's grief was expressed in the inscription he composed when, nine years later, he placed an urn in the Parish Church of St Lawrence in memory of Utrecia. His Latin inscription translates as:

> *"RG placed this here in an act of mourning and in childhood memories of Utrecia Smith, an innocent, elegant and uncomplicated girl." 1754*

Sadly for me, Utrecia's Urn sits rather forlornly in a corner of the church but I was gladdened to learn that when the slab supporting the Chancel floor collapsed in 2023 archaeologists discovered that together with her father William, mother, also named Utrecia, and sister Mary, Utrecia lies buried beneath the Chancel. William Shenstone also commemorated Utrecia in his poem *"Ophelia's Urn. To Mr Graves."*

Charles and John Charles Wesley "the Methodists"

Contemporaries on the Oxford scene were Charles and John Wesley who as students had devoted much of their private time to religious study, forming a student club whose members met regularly to read and discuss religious texts and to offer spiritual guidance to the sick and poor of Oxford. Other students called them the Holy Club but so methodical was their discipline and the regularity of their meetings that they were nicknamed *"the Methodists"*. Charles and John went to Georgia in America as missionaries but came back unsuccessful and disillusioned. Charles Wesley was also well known to Morgan Graves and in 1737 spent a month at Mickleton Manor.



A year later the Wesleys were attending meetings in London where they both underwent a so-called "evangelical conversion", regained their faith and resolved to travel the country preaching in the open air to working people in the mining and factory towns of England and Wales. Knowing that singing was popular amongst the working classes, the Wesleys, together with their partner George Whitefield, introduced hymn singing into their services, which was frowned upon as being frivolous by the Church of England, whose services focussed on prayer, communion and sermons. Charles Wesley of course, went on to write over 6,500 hymns during his lifetime including favourites such as *"Christ the Lord Is Risen Today", "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling"*, and *"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing."* (although the tune we sing today is by Mendelssohn).

So spare a thought for Charles Wesley in the summer of 1737, taking tea with the Graves family, enjoying the social life of the Manor, perhaps walking in our village and the hills above Mickleton and perhaps humming the odd tune which would one day become familiar as one of his hymns.

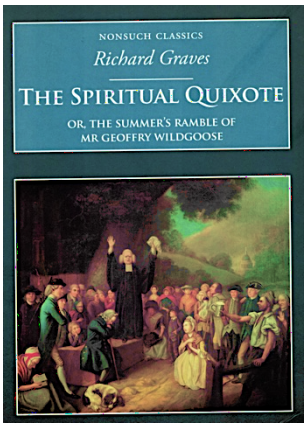
As for Richard, it was expected that Fellows of All Souls would prepare themselves for a career in the church, except for those pursuing medicine or civil law. Richard had exhausted the financial support from his older brother but entertained notions of being a poet and author and also pursued a growing interest in archaeology and Roman artefacts like his father. One of his father's friends and fellow antiquarians was a certain George Ballard of Chipping Campden whose livelihood was as a corset or mantua maker. Ballard transferred his friendship to Richard Graves the younger and when Ballard died in 1755 he left Graves his collection of roman coins.

Richard flirted briefly with the idea of studying medicine, or Physick, as it was called then and a rather rudimentary science, but realistically the only vocation open to him was the church. His elder brother, Morgan, had been at Lincoln's Inn with William Fitzherbert of Tissington Hall in the Peak District and so it was that Richard Graves was to become curate in Tissington, where his younger brother Charles Caspar Graves would later become vicar.

After three years Richard moved on to become curate at Aldworth in Berkshire, where at the age of 31 he fell in love with Lucy Bartholomew, a farmer's daughter. Trouble was, she was only fourteen and hardly marriage material for a man of both the church and gentry, so he paid for her to go to a boarding school in London to be educated. A year later they were married in secret in a seedy part of London called the Fleet. His reason for secrecy was that Fellows of All Souls were forbidden to marry and to lose his fellowship was to lose a significant income as well as the approval of his elder brother, Morgan, who might have expected his brother to marry into a wealthy family.

In October 1747 Lucy bore him a son, named Richard after his father, grandfather, and great-great grandfather. Eventually in 1749 Richard's double life caught up with him and he resigned his fellowship of All Souls. From here until Morgan's death in 1770 it appears Richard had little contact with his family in Mickleton. He secured a parish in Claverton, outside Bath and settled down to life as a country vicar for the next fifty years – his passion for writing novels and poetry undimmed. He outlived his siblings and died in 1804 at the age of 89.

The Spiritual Quixote:



No mention of Richard Graves would be complete without some reference to his most famous work, "The Spiritual Quixote" - a romantic and comedic novel, the plotline of which is based on Don Quixote and which ridicules the activities of the early Methodists, the Wesleys, George Whitefield, as well as other characters based on his acquaintances in Bath - allowing Graves to satirise other aspects of 18th Century society.



The book tells the story of a young man, Geoffry Wildgoose who, having come down from university to live with his mother at a country house in a North Cotswolds village, engages in a theological debate with the vicar in which he loses face and then determines to preach his own version of the gospel to prove himself correct. To set the scene, here is a sketch by Richard Graves which he sent to his publisher as a suggested frontispiece which shows a village scene, just about identifiable as Mickleton, with the tree on the plantation surrounded by cottages and the manor and church spire.

First of all he gathers the local farmworkers on the village green where he receives the admiration of the local buffoon and cobbler called Jerry Tugwell, who hangs on his master's every word. When young Geoffry tires of preaching to the peasants and yeomen of the village, he decides to preach his gospel further afield and Tugwell (much to the disgust of his long suffering wife) decides to accompany his master as his squire in a parallel with Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, but instead of a horse and donkey, the pair set off on foot up the Cotswold Hills to preach to the locals at an annual festival called the Dover's Hill Revels.

Tugwell, however warns his master *"But here, when folks are got together to make merry, to break heads and kick shins and such as that, methinks they will hardly have time to hear us preach and they may only laugh at us for talking about religion, or may pelt us with dirt and horse dung."*

The tale continues:

"On Dover's Hill there was a confused noise of trumpets, drums and whistles……..swains in their holiday clothes, with their belts and silk handkerchiefs and nymphs in straw hats and tawdry ribbons, flaunting, ogling and coquetting in their rustic way, …….. A ring was formed about the wrestlers and cudgel players by the substantial farmers on their long tailed steeds."

"A holland smock was hoisted on a pole and six scantily clad young women came forward to race for the smock. Affronted by this immodesty, young Geoffry climbed onto a platform and began to preach in a vain attempt to stop the frivolities:

"Ah! my dear country-women, you that are so solicitous for terrestrial garments, these garments spotted by the flesh! let me beseech you to labour after the celestial robes, the spiritual decorations and saint-like ornaments of piety, meekness, and chastity; and not to set your hearts upon such profane trappings as pink ribbands and holland smocks. Indeed, what use will you make of these tawdry shifts, should you gain the prize! I blush to answer such a question. They may make a poor shift, like the fig-leaves of Eve, to cover the nakedness of your bodies, as our good works clothe nakedness of our souls. But unless you are clothed with a better righteousness than your own, you will hereafter be stripped bare, and be exposed to the derision of men and angels. Mr Wildgoose was going on to explain some of the most mysterious doctrines of Christianity to these unruly disciples, when a publican, thinking his trade was in danger, cried out, lift up the smock! come, my maids! stand ready for the sport!

He was seconded by a shrewd young carter, with a silk handkerchief about his neck, who could not but laugh at the familiarity of Wildgoose's comparisons; and thinking also that this harangue would spoil the diversion, which they were now intent upon, he threw the rind of an orange at the orator's head. Another levelled a piece of horse-dung, with unlucky dexterity into Tugwell's mouth as he stood listening …….. to his master's eloquence. Their example was followed by the crowd of onlookers; who, as Jerry had predicted, began to bombard them furiously with clods of dirt and horse-dung, so that Mr Wildgoose was soon forced to dismount from the top of his platform and one of them, tilting up the bench on which Tugwell was standing, sent him sprawling into a pool of horse urine and stale beer; where he lay wallowing for some time, before being rescued by his master."

Leaving Mickleton and Chipping Campden Wildgoose and Tugwell travel round the West Country, Cirencester, Bath, Bristol, South Wales, and the Midlands, in a misguided attempt at preaching religious reform, suffering a series of misadventures, including being shanghaied, - he falls in love; he visits a number of people and places clearly recognisable from episodes of the author's life, including Tissington Hall and the Peak District.

In the final chapters Wildgoose is brought back to reality by a blow on the head from a flying decanter at Warwick races and returns to his North Cotswolds village, where his mother moves into a cottage and Wildgoose moves into the Manor House with his new wife, reconciles himself with the vicar and enjoys a rural, contented life.

Morgan Graves and the Succession of Mickleton Manor

Morgan Graves was apparently unlucky in love, having pursued a lady called Anna Brace who, on the advice of her mother, turned him down in favour of a wealthier man, a certain Mr Copley. In 1742 however, Morgan married Anne Walwyn from Longworth in Herefordshire and she bore him three sons, Walwyn Graves, born in 1744, Richard Morgan Graves born in 1752 and Danvers Graves, born in 1753 (a soldier who died in the West Indies in 1789 aged 35). The death of Morgan Graves in 1771 heralded an unhappy period of forty years in which the manor changed hands four times.

Little is recorded of the life of eldest son Walwyn, who died without issue in 1813 when the Manor passed to his surviving brother, Richard Morgan Graves, at one time vicar of Mickleton and later of Malvern. Richard died just two years later in 1815 and the manor passed to his eldest son, another Morgan, who didn't marry and died at the age of 41 in 1819 - just four years after his father. Morgan's brother, John Graves, was a soldier who predeceased him by a year, leaving an infant daughter, Elizabeth Anne Graves who inherited the Manor of Mickleton in 1819 at the age of two.

Sir John Maxwell Steele-Graves



The Manor was reported to be heavy with debt because of Walwyn's extravagance, but at the age of 21, on 31 July 1838 Elizabeth married John Maxwell Steele (1812 – 1872) whose father Richard was a Baronet living at Dixton Manor House (right) near Winchcombe. In the 1851 census the married couple were registered at Suffolk Square, Cheltenham where they were living with their daughter Frances and 5 servants and so I assume they divided their time between Cheltenham and Mickleton.

Upon assuming the baronetcy on his father's death In 1862, John Maxwell changed his name to Steele-Graves and his wife became Dame Elizabeth. Between them they became great benefactors to the village of Mickleton.

Sir John served as Treasurer for the local charities and was a leading light in the Vestry Committee (the fore-runner of the Parish Council). At this time there was a village pond where the High Street turns into Chapel Lane opposite the Three Ways, fed by a brook which ran from the hill at Hidcote, along Church Lane and on through the village to Tadpole and Broad Marston Lane. It was culverted under the High Street and at various other points and generally used for disposal of sewage. You can still see an original cast iron stench pipe on the High Street near Medford House and the base of another opposite the Three Ways. Sir John was very involved in negotiations to keep the culverts flushed, including a scheme he proposed to use the old fishpond in the field behind the church as a collecting pond, to be fitted with a sluice gate to flush the brook and culverts from time to time. However, this did not go ahead. It is interesting to note that mains sewerage did not come to Mickleton until 1951.

The issue of drinking water and wells was a regular problem and eventually the village pond was filled in and Sir John took it upon himself to pipe water from his reservoir on the hill at Kiftsgate which fed the Manor, installing three stand pipes at Tadpole, Chapel Lane and the High Street, two of which remain today. He also planned to provide a drinking water fountain on the plantation in the centre of the village, for which he commissioned a design from a leading architect of the day, William Burges.



However, he did not live to see it installed, as he died at the age of 61 in 1872 and the fountain was completed three years after his death by his widow, Dame Elizabeth. In the space of two years she had lost not only her husband but also her daughter, Frances Bowen-Graves aged just 29 and so when the fountain was completed in 1875 she dedicated it as a memorial to her husband and daughter who are shown in marble roundels inside the Fountain.

When Dame Elizabeth died in 1877 at the age of 60, the Manor passed to her younger sister, Mary Graves who had married Maxwell Hamilton and just eight years later to Mary's son, Sidney Graves Hamilton.

Sidney Graves Hamilton

Educated at Harrow School, he became a respected Oxford Scholar, and inherited the Manor on the death of his mother in 1885 when he was just thirty years old. He had already began the work of dismantling the Portico and Library Wing of the Manor, (pictured below on the left) creating a horse-drawn railway to drag the stones up the elm avenue and Glyde Hill to the top of the escarpment where he rebuilt them as the frontage of a splendid new home, Kiftsgate Court (pictured below on the right). In 1906 at the age of 51 he married Rosa Leah Pidgeon, 32, and decided to let both the Manor and Kiftsgate when they moved to Combe Lodge in Great Malvern. A year later, in 1907, his only daughter was born - Mary Graves Hamilton.





Sidney died in 1916 and in 1919 his widow, Rosa Hamilton, decided to keep and let the Manor but to sell Kiftsgate Court to Jack and Heather Muir who began the dynasty of female gardeners for which Kiftsgate is now famous.

If you remember this photograph from earlier in the story, it had been hung by Sidney Graves Hamilton in an anteroom at Kiftsgate Court and I was intrigued to see that the family crest on the reverse was not that of the Graves family but of the Hamilton Family. Clearly, Sidney was prouder of his father's ancestry than his mother's. Of course the Hamiltons are a famous Scottish clan dating back to the earls of Arran in the 15th century, when one was briefly heir to the Scottish throne.





Mary Graves-Hamilton

His daughter, Mary Graves-Hamilton, became the last owner of the Manor when her mother Rosa died in 1931. Mary was born on 18 August 1907, in Great Malvern. We know very little about her life and have no photographs, but I found her in the 1921 census when, as a 14 year old, she was a boarder at Bedford Girls School. She graduated from Oxford University, with a Bachelor of Arts degree and in the 1939 survey she was registered living at "Laleham", 200 Harpenden Road, St Albans, where her mother had died in 1931. Mary's occupation was given as "private means - also artist". She died aged 75 at 8 Harpenden Road, St. Albans. I gather she was a benevolent landlord, allowing one of her staff to live rent free in Goldby Lodge for about 18 months. She visited occasionally and stayed from time to time in the Three Ways. Her land agents were Smith Woolley and I once met a former employee of Smith Woolley who was accustomed to meeting her in the garden at the manor for afternoon tea to discuss her affairs. An appeal to the Facebook Group in St Albans drew no response and I'd love to discover more about her.

The Graves family Monument



Although the date of its creation is not known, a striking monument to the later generations of the Graves family can be found in the churchyard of the Parish Church of St Lawrence. Probably created for Sir John Maxwell Steele-Graves, who died in 1872, it houses not only his remains but also those of his widow, Dame Elizabeth, their daughter Frances Bowen-Graves and her husband Francis Bowen. Also Elizabeth's sister, Mary Graves and her husband Maxwell Hamilton, their son Sidney Graves-Hamilton, his wife Rosa and daughter Mary Graves-Hamilton, who was the ninth and last family member to be interred in the crypt below the memorial in 1982. In 2025 a group of volunteers from the Mickleton Society cleared the monument of forty years of brambles and it now occupies a striking central position in the churchyard.

And so the Graves-Hamilton line and it's links to Mickleton came to a close after 326 years. Here is a chart of the Graves family tree. (A name in bold type indicates succession to the Manor).

<table>
<tr><td colspan="4">Richard Graves, London & Mickleton – Lawyer 1610 -1669
Samuel Graves, Mickleton 1649 – 1708
Richard Graves, Mickleton – Antiquary 1677 – 1729</td></tr>
<tr><td>Morgan Graves,
Lincoln's Inn
1708 – 1771</td><td>Richard Graves,
Vicar of Claverton
1715 – 1804</td><td>Charles Graves,
Vicar of Tissington
1717 – 1787</td><td>Danvers Graves,
East India Co.
1720 – 1752</td></tr>
<tr><td>Walwyn Graves
1744 – 1813
Died without issue</td><td colspan="2">Richard Morgan Graves
Vicar of Mickleton & Malvern
1752 – 1815</td><td>Danvers Graves
Soldier - died in West Indies 1753 – 1789</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Morgan Graves, Vicar of Mickleton
(1778 - 1819) unmarried</td><td colspan="2">John Graves, Soldier
(1780 - 1818)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Elizabeth Graves (1817 - 1877)
m John Maxwell Steele (1812 – 1872)</td><td colspan="2">Mary Graves (1818 - 1885)
m Maxwell Hamilton (1801 – 1867)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Sidney Graves Hamilton (1855 – 1916). m Rosa Leah Pidgeon in 1906
Created Kiftsgate Court out of the Portico and Library Wing of the Manor</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Mary Graves Hamilton b 1907 in Malvern died 1982 unmarried in St Albans</td></tr>
</table>

The Paley Family

Probably the first family to be tenants at the manor after the Graves family left in 1906 were the Paley family. Colonel Edward Groves Paley of the 8th Hussars was born in Paddington, London, in 1849, the son of a barrister from Bradford in Yorkshire. Edward was educated in Brighton before joining the army and after a military career he was recorded in the 1911 census as living in Mickleton Manor with his wife Georgina Hyde Paley and three servants. Tragically, their son, Captain Raymond Paley, also a soldier, had died (probably of TB) in 1906 at the age of 32 - just a year after marrying Sybil Gardner, who was pregnant with their first child at the time of his death. Sybil, who became a

well-known illustrator of children's books, remarried but the marriage ended in divorce 14 years later and the son from her first marriage to Raymond died at the age of 26 in an avalanche in Canada.

Colonel Paley and his wife Georgina were registered in the 1921 census living in South Kensington but Georgina died in 1927. Colonel Paley lived on in South Kensington until he died in 1937 but clearly Mickleton held special memories for them as in 1922 they dedicated a beautiful stained glass window in the Church of St Lawrence to their son Raymond who was buried in the churchyard and then a second in memory of his wife Georgina.

Raymond's grave is one of the most unusual (and overlooked) graves in the churchyard - the pink granite cross set into the grass by the door to the bell tower.

Brigadier Oswald Smith-Bingham

Following the Paley family was Brigadier-General Oswald Smith-Bingham CMG, DSO (Companion of the Order of St Michael & St George and Distinguished Service Order), who was born in 1868, educated at Winchester and enjoyed a much decorated military career in India, the Boer War in South Africa and the Great War. Despite being wounded at Ypres in 1915 he served through most of the war and in 1916 was promoted to Colonel. On his retirement from active service in 1917 at the age of 50 he was awarded the honorary title of Brigadier General.

Iin 1928 he was instrumental in helping to form a Mickleton and district branch of the British Legion. In the 1939 *Kelly's Directory* he is listed as living at The Manor, Mickleton (tel. Mickleton 15) and was still there at his death on 24 March 1949 at the age of 81. His wife had predeceased him on 24 March 1945. They had three sons. He is remembered as a leader of the Home Guard in Mickleton and famously installed gun ports in the Manor wall by the telephone box, in case the Germans invaded and came along the High Street.



In the fifties the Manor housed a private school for boys - and then the St Hilliard School – a boarding school for boys, some of whom came from problem homes in the Birmingham area. It had previously been at Newnham near Gloucester but perhaps outgrew its premises there. I found an online discussion thread about life at St Hilliards in Mickleton. Former pupils spoke of the awful food, cross country runs up Meon Hill, tuck shops, bullying by teachers and the ghost of father Ambrose. The headmaster was a Peter Prankherd who drove an old Rolls Royce. Two of the boys reportedly ran away, stole a car which then crashed, slept in a barn and then set fire to it. They were brought back to the school by the Police.

I was on holiday in Yorkshire last year and got talking to a chap who, learning I was from Mickleton, told me he had been a pupil there. His father had died when he was young and his mother, unable to cope, had agreed to him going to St Hilliards. He had fond memories of Mickleton and amazed me by recalling the names of local boys he had played football and cricket against and also the names of some of the local girls and their families.

However, by the seventies, the Manor was empty and delapidated and In 1976 the House and grounds were offered to the village by Mary Graves-Hamilton, for £15,000. The Parish Council published a leaflet for Mickleton residents setting out the case for purchasing the Manor for community use. However, there was insufficient support for the idea and the offer was turned down. In 1985 land in the gardens was sold for development as Old Manor Gardens and the Manor House was divided into four dwellings.

The Graves Family in Ireland

Returning to the 17th century Graves family, William - brother of Richard Graves - had gone to Ireland in 1647 to do Cromwell's bidding in suppressing the Catholic and Royalist rebels. William was rewarded with lands in Ballymack and Burnchurch, Co. Kilkenny. He later returned to England but, he left two of his sons in Ireland, Richard and Henry Richard, from whom descended a notable family of sailors, admirals, bishops, doctors and professors.

The Graves family were leading lights of Georgian society in Dublin, and married into the Perceval family. Spencer Perceval was, of course, the first British Prime Minister to be assassinated in 1812.

Born in Dublin in 1846, Alfred Perceval Graves became a schools inspector in London, was widowed in 1886 and in 1891 married into the distinguished German von Ranke family. His son, Robert von Ranke Graves, went to Charterhouse school and, after dropping the von Ranke part of his name, served as a young officer in the First World War.



He is remembered as Robert Graves - one of our more famous war poets alongside Siegfried Sassoon, Rupert Brooke, and Wilfred Owen.

He famously wrote his biography "Goodbye to all that…." in which he makes reference to being descended from a distinguished Gloucestershire family.

After the war he went to Oxford University. A prolific writer (he wrote over 140 books including "I, Claudius" and a biography of his friend, Lawrence of Arabia) he moved to Majorca. He died at his home in Majorca at the age of 90.

On 11 November 1985 he was one of 16 War Poets commemorated on a plaque in Westminster Abbey but he was the only one living at that time.

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