

Some Memories of Bishop Graves

In the history of Irish antiquarian research, the work of the Ordnance Survey holds an important place. It was begun in the late 1830s in response to the recommendation of the parliamentary commission chaired by Lord Monteagle (Thomas Spring-Rice, Mount Trenchard). In the aftermath of the Famine, the intensification of interest in Gaelic scholarship represented something of a rebellion against the continuing dominance of British history to the detriment of a now obviously diminishing Gaelic culture. In its own way, it represented a rebellion just as important as better-known rebellions of 1848 and 1867. The Celtic Society was founded 1847 and the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland (known at its inception as the Kilkenny Archaeological Society) in 1849.

The great generation of antiquarians post-Famine included the renowned Bishop of Limerick, Dr Charles Graves (1812-1899, Bishop of Limerick 1866-99), who came to antiquarian research from the background of a distinguished career in mathematics at Trinity College Dublin. In 1852 he, Monteagle and Lord Dunraven became members of the Commission established for the publication of the Ancient Laws of Ireland. It became known as the Brehon Laws Commission. As such, Graves was instrumental in appointing Eugene O'Curry and John O'Donovan (native of south Kilkenny) to undertake the work. Both scholars had been involved in the Ordnance Survey and, when this ceased in 1842, both were free to work on the Brehon Laws. For their greater comfort, he loaned his chambers in Trinity College to O'Curry and O'Donovan.¹ O'Curry, of Dunaha on the Loop Head peninsula, had come to Limerick after his school failed, and worked on the construction of Wellesley Bridge and later as a warder in the Limerick Asylum. From there he joined O'Donovan to work on the Ordnance Survey. Now together again working on the Brehon laws, the preliminary transcription and translation took five years. With the work incomplete, O'Donovan died in 1861 and O'Curry in 1862.

Bishop Graves's willingness to appoint Eugene O'Curry and John O'Donovan to the Brehon Laws project on their merit as scholars, though both men were Catholic and the sons of Irish peasant farmers, is consistent with his popularity across the religious divide. Prejudice dogged the pair in their work, and a Belfast legal expert with little Irish scholarship, Hancock, was superimposed to see the work to complet-

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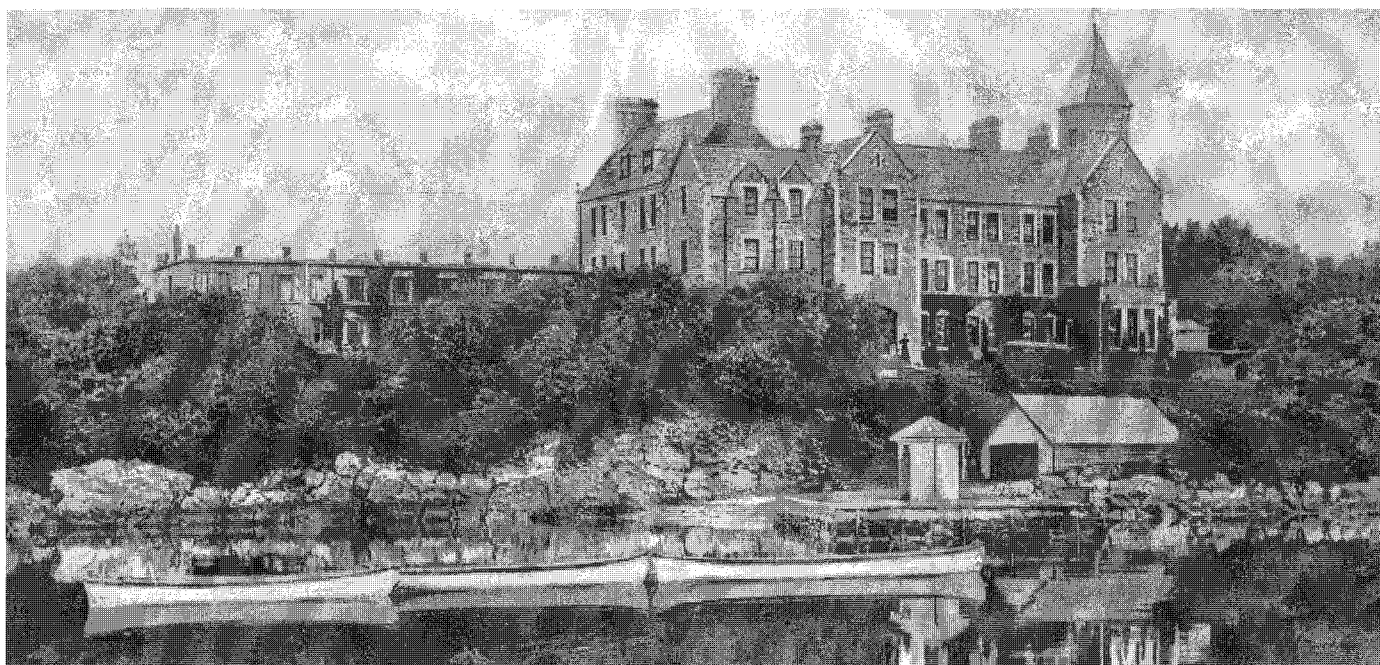
ion. His new demands required O'Curry and O'Donovan to rework the translations already done. They appealed to Graves, who became caught in the middle as he tried to smooth relations. Graves showed equal solicitude for the work of another Catholic, the historian and archivist John Gilbert. In 1852, Gilbert was turned down for membership of the Royal Irish Academy, though his list of supporting signatures included Graves.²

Graves family background

According to the *Dictionary of National Biography* in an entry about one of the names that follows (Rev. Richard Graves), the Irish ancestor of this family was a Colonel Graves, who commanded a

regiment of horse in the army of the Parliament and volunteered for service in Ireland in 1647. The Limerick line takes its descent from the Rev. James Graves, vicar of Kilfinane and Darragh. He had two eminent sons. One was Dean Thomas Graves of Ardfert, who lived during the 1780s at Sackville, near Ardfert village. Judge Day of Kerry (whose seat was Loughlinstown House in south Dublin) corresponded with the Dean as 'cousin', though the pedigrees do not make clear the connection. The Dean of Ardfert later became an eminent Dean of Connor, residing at Carrigfergus, before retiring to Kinsale. The Dean's brother, Rev. Richard Graves, was Professor of Divinity at Trinity College Dublin (1819). The Dublin base of the family was strengthened when the Dean of Ardfert's son, the barrister John Crosbie Graves, became chief of police. His son was the future Bishop of Limerick.





Parknasilla House, summer home of Bishop Graves. Postcard, c.1910.

(Tom Keogh Collection)

When the former chief of police died in January 1835, old Judge Day, native of Tralee, heard the news at Loughlinstown House. (Day was an old political associate with the chief of police's father, the Dean of Ardfert.) He recorded the following tribute, which, inter alia, anticipates the academic brilliance of the future Bishop:

Thursday, 15th January, 1835. Alas poor John Graves died last Tuesday of a five days brain fever, leaving in misery a wife, two daughters and four highly-talented and accomplish'd sons. He was my oldest acquaintance living of all my friends out of my own family and my own birth parentage and pedigree. I do not know better than his.³

Kerry and the collecting of Ogham inscriptions

The career of Dr Graves to his appointment to Limerick in 1866 is traced by his son, Alfred Perceval Graves (b. 1846), in his autobiography, *To Return to All That* (London 1930). (Alfred became H.M. Inspector of Schools in Manchester and writer of such songs as *Father O'Flynn*). In his autobiography, Alfred tells us that Graves was appointed Dean of the Chapel Royal (in Dublin Castle), which appointment provided his family with the opportunity to attend all the ceremonial occasions in Dublin Castle. Simultaneously, he held his fellowship in Trinity and was appointed Dean of Ardfagh. During the 1860s, he was also President of the Royal Irish Academy, presided at many of its lectures and contributed occasionally an article to its journal.

It was during the middle 1860s, and still based in Dublin, that the future bishop picked up the threads of his family's old association with Kerry: it was then that he first brought his family to Parknasilla. Situated near the village of Sneem, he took a house there from the Blands of Derry-

quin, a stone's throw away. They returned there annually. The house still stands and is called 'The Bishop's House'. It would become a convenient base for the Bishop to conduct his visitations to places within the Ardfert and Aghadoe division of the combined diocese, and Parknasilla provided the base from which he was able to conduct his antiquarian outings to ring forts and other sites in a region rich in archaeology. Finally, summers at Parknasilla provided him and his family with the pleasure of getting to know visiting historians and antiquarians, including J.A. Froude, author of *The English in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* and the historical novel, *The Two Chiefs of Dunboy*. The Bishop shared with the local parish priest, Fr Michael Walsh (PP Sneem 1829-1866), an interest in the Irish language, and Fr Walsh became the model for Father O'Flynn. At this time the Catholic Bishop of Kerry, David Moriarty, made an outstanding claim to fame with his famous condemnation of the Fenians, with its ringing conclusion 'Hell is not hot enough, or eternity long enough ...'.

Graves appears to have known, or at least corresponded with, the great Kerry antiquarian, Archdeacon Arthur Blennerhassett Rowan, before Parknasilla days. Archdeacon Rowan (1800-1861), founder of *The Kerry Magazine*, introduced Graves to the young Kerryman, Richard Hitchcock, who assisted Graves in the recording of ogham stone inscriptions, a field of study in which Graves became the acknowledged expert. Archdeacon Rowan died in August 1861.⁴

Graves would continue to engage with historical societies in Dublin long after his arrival in Limerick as bishop in 1866, notably as one of the Irish commissioners on the Historic Manuscripts Commission. (A fellow-commissioner was Lord Edmond Fitzmaurice of the Lansdowne family, author of works on his ancestor, Sir William Petty).

The Graves link with Limerick ended with the Bishop's death in 1899, the house in Parknasilla having been already sold. (The purchasers were the Great Southern Hotels, who built a fine hotel beside it). Alfred continued to live in England and purchased a house in Harlech, Wales. He became involved in the Irish Literary Society and the Irish Texts Society and when he died, his passing was noticed in the publication of the County Kerry Society, a genteel circle of Kerry exiles which held an annual dinner on St. Patrick's Day. In Limerick, the Bishop was long remembered, due primarily, perhaps, to popularity across the religious divide. His poet grandson, Robert (son of Alfred Perceval), came to Limerick in 1919 as a member of the Royal Welch Fusiliers after seeing action in the trenches. In his autobiography, *Goodbye to All That*, he recounts what he heard about the Bishop's funeral ("wake") in Limerick in 1899, with its very large Catholic attendance. He touched on this again in an article for *The Old Limerick Journal* (vol.8, Autumn 1981), this time giving the reason for the large attendance: the Catholic bishop, with whom he was on terms of considerable friendship, had encouraged his flock to attend.

REFERENCES

1. Patricia Boyne, *John O'Donovan (1806-1861), a Biography* (Kilkenny 1987), p.95, 101.
2. Siobhan O'Rafferty, *Gilbert and the Royal Irish Academy in Sir John T. Gilbert 1829-1898 Historian, Archivist and Librarian* (Dublin 1999), p.45-58.
3. Royal Irish Academy, Day Papers, Ms.12w17.
4. Russell McMorran article on Archdeacon Rowan in *Cork Hollybow 1985*, quoted in L.Kelly, G. Lucid and M.O'Sullivan (eds.), *Blennerville: Gateway to Tralee's Past*, p.242.