

The Cunninghame-Graham Family

One of the most notable families associated with St Johns Church, in the 19th and 20th century were the Cunninghame- Graham family. The stained-glass window behind the central altar, and the window in the Lady Chapel are both dedicated to the memory of a young curate, who died of tuberculosis in 1885. His name was Malise Cunninghame Graham. He was born in 1860 and died on the 26th of November 1885. His mother, Anne Elizabeth Bontine Cunninghame Graham is also commemorated in the church, first by a plaque on the left-hand side of the altar stating that she was born in on a ship, HMS Barham, and she was making the journey between Jamaica and Venezuela on the 10th of February 1828. Her father , Admiral Fleming was 40 when he married his 16-year-old Spanish bride Dona Catalina. They had five children, of whom Anne Elizabeth was the eldest . After her birth at a sea she spent the first three years of her life, living in a colonial house near to the cathedral in Caracas. The two distinguished liberators of Venezuela, Simon Bolivar and Jose Antonio Paez were their neighbours and friends. Anne Elizabeth after an eventful life spent in Scotland, London and Winchester died on the 27th of March 1925. There is a further plaque to her memory, which can be found at the bottom of the wooden pulpit to the left-hand side of the screen. The plaque was placed by her son, Robert Cunninghame Graham, the elder brother of Malise..

Malise was educated at Winchester College, where he was an organ scholar and Oxford University. He left Oxford in the summer of 1883. He was described as a handsome man, with almost ethereal looks, Pre-Raphaelite, long-haired, wearing red socks, much to his mother's consternation! He was attached to St Johns Church as a curate. He worked hard in the parish with both the believers and nonbelievers. His mother observed that he had a permanent cough, the beginnings of tuberculosis. His condition worsened. In the summer of 1885 he went to Switzerland seeking a cure. He returned briefly to parish life but died in the November after no more than 2 years in the parish. There were several tributes to his personal gifts and influence. The Wykehamist in an obituary dedicated to Malise said. "His original power of discovering innate capacity in what to others would seem unlikely places was quite unique. The musical and dramatic element which he developed in a very short time in the children of St Johns Parish was a surprise to everyone and will not soon be forgotten. In politics, a strong Liberal, he held the primary object of Christianity is to make this world a better place, and to this end, he consistently devoted both his personal example, and his teaching."

However, it is Robert, his elder brother, who will be remembered as a figure of national significance not only in Britain, but also in South America. Robert was an explorer, gaucho in the Argentina and Paraguay, a Liberal Party member of Parliament; the first ever Socialist member of the Parliament of United Kingdom, a founder of the Scottish Labour Party (1888 --1893); a founder of the National Party of Scotland; and the first president of the Scottish National Party in 1934. He also served a short term in prison and wrote prolifically -- travel books, a biography, poetry, essays, short stories. He was a close and influential friend of Joseph Conrad, George Bernard Shaw, GK Chesterton, WH Hudson and John Galsworthy. One his novels--The Mission--was made into a film with Jeremmy Irons and Robert de Niro.

Robert was educated at Harrow School, finishing his education in Brussels, before moving to Argentina to make his fortune as a cattle rancher. He was 17 at the time, and spoke fluent Spanish , a language he learned from his grandmother. His business venture failed, but Robert was employed to several years as a gaucho working on large farms with cattle stock. In 1872, Robert rode on horseback to 600 miles up the River Pirana to the Iguaca Falls, researching the role of the early Jesuits with the local Indians. The book was called , Vanished Arcadia, later becoming the subject of the film -- the Mission. After spending 10 years in the Argentine, where he was known as Don Roberto he had further adventures, including travelling in Morocco, disguised as a Turkish sheik, prospecting for gold in Spain, and befriending Buffalo Bill in Texas and teaching fencing lessons in Mexico City.

After the death of his father in Scotland in 1883 he returned to the UK and became interested in politics. He attended socialist meetings, where he heard and met William Morris, George Bernard Shaw, Keir Hardie and John Burns. Despite his wealthy origins, Graham converted to socialism, and he began to speak at public meetings. He was an impressive orator and was especially good at dealing with hecklers.

Liberal Party MP.

Although a socialist, in the 1886 general election, he stood as a Liberal party candidate at Northwest Lanarkshire. His election programme was extremely radical and called for the following.

- The abolition of the House of Lords.
- Universal suffrage.
- The nationalisation of land, mines and other industries.
- Free school meals.
- The disestablishment of the Church of England.
- Scottish home rule.
- The establishment of an eight hour working day.

Supported by liberals and socialist, Graham defeated the Unionist party candidate by over 300 votes. At Westminster, he refused to accept the conventions of the British House of Commons. In September 1887 he was suspended from Parliament to making what was called a disrespectful reference to the House of Lords. He was the first MP to be suspended from the House of Commons for swearing; the word was damn.

Graham's main concerns in the House of Commons were the plight of the unemployed and the preservation of civil liberties. He complained about attempts in 1886 in 1887 by the police to prevent public meetings and free speech. He attended a protest demonstration in Trafalgar Square in November 1887 that was broken up by the Police and became known as Bloody Sunday. Graham was badly beaten and arrested. Both Graham and John Burns, were found guilty for their involvement in the demonstration and sentenced to six weeks imprisonment.

When Graham was released from Pentonville prison he continued his campaign to improve the rights of working people and to curb economic exploitation. He was suspended from the House of Commons in December 1888, for protesting about the working conditions of chain makers.

Scottish Independence, and the Scottish Labour Party.

Graham was a strong supporter of Scottish independence, and in 1886 and helped establish the Scottish Home Rule Association and while in the House of Commons, made several attempts to persuade fellow MPs of the desirability of a Scottish parliament.

Within the House of Commons, Graham became increasingly more radical and went on to found the Scottish Labour Party with Keir Hardie. Graham left the Liberal party in 1892, to contest the general election in a new constituency as a Labour candidate.

He supported workers in their industrial disputes and was actively involved with Annie Besant, and the MatchGirls Strike and the 1889 Dockers Strike . He attended the Marxist congress of the Second International in Paris. The following year he made a speech in Calais that was considered by the authorities, to be so revolutionary that he was arrested and expelled from France.

Graham was a supporter of the eight hour day and made several attempts to introduce a Bill on the subject. He made some progress with this in the summer of 1892, but he was unable to persuade the Conservative and Unionist government, headed by Lord Salisbury, to allocate time the bill to be fully debated. He lost his seat in 1892, but helped Keir Hardie establish the Independent Labour Party.

He played an active part in the establishment of the National Party of Scotland in 1928 and was elected the first ever President of the Scottish National party in 1934..

Author.

He was closely associated with the works of Joseph Conrad and undertook some research for him on the novel Nostromo. The book is dedicated to Cunninghame Graham. George Bernard Shaw was indebted to

Graham, for his play. "Captain Brassbound's Conversion" as well as passages in "Arms and the Man". GK Chesterton, famously proclaimed in his autobiography that Cunninghame Graham had "achieved the adventure of being Cunninghame Graham". There are a number of biographies of Cunninghame Graham, including Don Roberto by A .F.Tschiffely in 1937 and two more recent studies. -- Cunninghame Graham: a critical biography by Cedric Watts and Laurence Davies published by Cambridge University Press in 1979. His niece, Jean Cunninghame Graham has written his biography in 2004 called Gaucho Laird, published by the Long Riders Guild Press.

Robert Cunninghame Graham died in March 1936 at the Plaza Hotel in Buenos Aires, Argentine. Thousands attended his funeral, as a mark of respect, in the streets of Buenos Aires. His body was shipped home and interred in the ruined Augustinian priory on the Island of Inchmahome, Lake of Menteith, Stirling.

His mother, Ann Elizabeth Bontine, and his grandmother, Dona Catalina, and his youngest brother, Malise, are all buried in the St Johns Church cemetery on the Alresford Road, Winchester.

JKH.