

GEORGE GRAVES, F.L.S. (1784-1839?)

By W. H. CURTIS.

George Graves was born at Newington Butts in the Parish of St. Mary Newington, Surrey, on May 23rd, 1784. To anyone who happens to have taken an interest in Graves the date of his birth may occasion some surprise, because it has usually been assumed that he flourished some years earlier. The date, however, is taken from the Registrar for London and Middlesex Quarterly Meeting 1720-1837 of the Society of Friends. In that most useful volume *A Biographical Index of Deceased British and Irish Botanists* by James Britten, F.L.S., and George S. Boulger, F.L.S., F.G.S., we find "George Graves fl: 1777-1834." The date 1777 was probably taken from Joseph Smith's *Catalogue of Friends Books*, 2 vols., 1867, in which George Graves is described as of Walworth, then of Peckham, and lastly of Edinburgh. He was further known to have left the Society of Friends, and eight of his works are listed between 1777 and 1834.

The eight works mentioned (Smith, *l.c.*, 1, 862) are as follows:

- Graves, George, of Walworth, after of Peckham, London, lastly of Edinburgh. (See Wm. Curtis) "*Flora Londinensis*," vol. 3, a new edition, enlarged by G. G. Vol. 4, 5 [a continuation by G. G.] Fol. 1777*, etc.
- , *British Ornithology*: being the history, with a coloured representation of every known species of British Birds. 3 vols. London: 8vo. 1811. Qt. Reprinted. 2nd Ed. 3 vols.: 1821.
 - , *Ovarium Britannicum*: being a correct delineation of the eggs of such birds as are native of, or domesticated in, Great Britain. London: 8vo. 1816.
 - , *The Naturalist's Pocket-Book, or Tourists' Companion*: being a brief introduction to the different branches of Natural History; with approved methods of collecting and preserving the various productions of Nature (with 6 plates, plain and coloured). London (1818): pp. 335.
 - , *Another* with a different title page.
 - , *Monograph of the British Grasses*, with descriptions published every two months. Royal 8vo. 1822.
 - , *The Naturalist's Journal and Miscellany*. Conducted by G. G. 16mo. 1832.
 - , *Hortus Medicus*: or figures and descriptions of the more important plants, used in medicine, or possessed of poisonous qualities; with their medical properties, chemical analysis, etc. The chemical and medical departments by J. D. Morries. Edinburgh: 4to. 1834.

*This was the date of the first volume of *Flora Londinensis*.

It was in March 1781 that William Curtis, F.L.S. (1746-1799), suffering from a severe attack of rheumatism which kept him indoors, by way of amusement set himself to design a beer jug and mug. This jug bears the designer's initials and the date 1781. The spout is so shaped as to form the upturned brim of a hat beneath which appears a cleverly moulded face believed for many years to be that of George Graves. As this jug and mug (they are now exhibited in the Curtis Museum, Alton, Hampshire) have never been out of the Curtis family it seems almost incredible that such a mistake should have been made, but once made it has continued to be accepted without question. The solution is that the face on the jug is of George's father, William Graves, "the constant and undeviating friend and assistant of Mr. Curtis," whom Samuel Curtis, F.L.S., writing in 1827 described as still working at the age of 73 when his colouring compared with any work extant. It may be remembered that coloured numbers of *Flora Londinensis* were sold at 5/- but some copies finished with extraordinary care cost 7/6. From long experience William Graves became a most competent colourist and was doubtless responsible for many of the plates for which a higher price was charged. What more natural than that Curtis should wish to associate his friend with this fine jug from which, no doubt, they drank many a good mug!

The writer has for long suspected some relationship between William and George Graves but the assumption that they belonged to the same generation seemed to eliminate the possibility of their being father and son. A miniature of William Graves and another of his wife, Mary, have been shown to me by the owner, Major J. S. Gemmell, D.S.O., M.C., of Woodbridge, Suffolk. They were painted in 1813 and 1814 by Stephen Poyntz Denning of Dulwich College. If Samuel Curtis's statement that William Graves was 73 years old in 1827 was correct, he must have been a young man of about 27 when the beer jug was made, and 59 or so when Denning painted his portrait. So far I have been unable to trace either the date or birth place of William Graves, or the maiden name of his wife, Mary. Mr. John Nickalls has been unable to find anything of the kind in the records of the Society of Friends which he has examined and the conclusions he has reached are either the marriage was in a record now lost, a most unlikely thing to happen seeing that so few are lost, or that William and his wife became Quakers after marriage.

Allowing for the differences in age, the face on the jug and the portrait by Denning are of the same man. There is the finely chiselled nose, the keen eyes, brown in the miniature, and almost the same wealth of hair.

According to the Register mentioned above, George was the eldest of several children of William and Mary Graves. The place of the monthly meeting is given throughout as Southwark but in the first entry William's occupation is omitted. With the birth of the second child, Joseph, born August 20, 1786, William is described as "colourer in Natural History". At the birth of the next child, Edward, in 1789 the

description of the father is merely "colourer", but at the birth of Samuel in 1793 the previous title is restored. A daughter Elizabeth is born in 1793 who is followed in 1795 by another son, Henry Swan, and in 1797 another daughter Frances. Now comes an interesting point. A daughter Mary is born on August 6, 1799, but William is no longer described as a "colourer" or "colourist" but as a "grocer" of Walworth Road.

In 1786 when the second child, Joseph, was born, the place of birth was given as Walworth Road, Parish of St. Mary Newington Butts, Co. Surrey, and probably George was born at the same house though the words "Walworth Road" were not inserted. In 1793, the address is Crown Row, Parish of St. Mary Newington.

It seems therefore that when his friend and employer William Curtis died on July 7th, 1799, William lost his job as a colourist and, in order to maintain a large family, was compelled to look around for some other means of earning a living. Why he entered the grocery business, for which he must have been totally unsuited, cannot be known for certain, but the Register contains what may be a hint on the same page, viz.: another Graves whose occupation is "grocer" and who may possibly have been a connection of some sort. William is still a grocer in July 1801 when another son, Bingham, appears, but with the birth of Rhoda in December 1803 William is again "a colourist" and his address is changed to Richmond Place, Walworth. As it has seemed necessary to introduce the names of William's children, it should perhaps be added that the youngest child, Thomas, was born at Crown Row in April 1806.

I have learnt nothing about George's early years, but from some notes in Minutes which Mr. John Nickalls, Librarian to the Society of Friends, has very kindly extracted for me, I find that George was for a time living in the house of Thomas Curtis, a younger brother of William, the botanist, whose works Thomas published. Thomas married Susannah Simmons. As a consequence of this George courted Thomas's daughter, Mary, and in 1806 they were married.

Entries in the Minutes of Southwark Monthly Meeting of the Society of Friends, dated 16.9.1806, 25.10.1806, and 13.1.1807-11.8.1807, tell the story how George and his young wife came to be disowned by the Society. It is enough to say that

"George Graves of St. George's Crescent (so called) in the Parish called St. George the Martyr, in the Borough, Southwark, Bookseller, son of William Graves of Newington Butts, Surrey, and Mary his wife, and Mary Curtis of St. George's Crescent (so called) aforesaid Daughter of Thos: Curtis of same place, deceased, and Susannah his wife now surviving, appeared together at this Meeting and declared their intention of taking each other in marriage . . .".

The formal disownment by the Society was made on 12.1.1808. A daughter whom they named Mary Ann was born on February 23, 1807, and their second child, William Curtis, on February 22nd, 1809. Both children were born at Garden Row, and George is described on both

occasions in the Register as a Bookseller, but the letters N.M. (signifying non-member) occur with the birth of the second child. Mr. Nickalls points out that the letters N.M. are included after the names of the later children by which they forfeited the birthright of membership through their parents, but he considers it probable that they continued to be worshippers because their children are in the Register.

In 1810 George Graves is described as a "colourer" and by 1815 as an "artist". In 1820 it may be added he was still living in London.

FLORA LONDINENSIS.

We come now to George's adventures in literature. On January 16, 1815, he became the owner—or more accurately part owner—of William Curtis's great, but unprofitable, work *Flora Londinensis*. As the agreement which is preserved in the Curtis Museum at Alton reveals a good deal in one way and another, it is worth while to consider it in some detail.

It is drawn up "between John Sims of Upper Guildford Street in the Parish of St. George, Bloomsbury, Doctor in Physick, and Thomas Fothergill now of Austin Friars in the City of London, gentleman, surviving executors named in the last Will and testament of William Curtis, late citizen and Apothecary of London deceased of the first part, Samuel Curtis late of Walworth in Surrey, florist, but now of — of the second part, and George Graves of Walworth in Surrey, gentleman of the third part Whereas the said John Sims and Thomas Fothergill together with Thomas Curtis, the other executor named in the Will, deceased did on or about the year 1802 contract and agree with the said Samuel Curtis for the sale to him of a certain work or publication called *Flora Londinensis* with the plates stock and materials and accounts belonging at the price of £600 and for securing the payment thereof the said Samuel Curtis did by his certain Bond or obligation bearing date the first day of March 1802 become bound to the said J.S., T.F. and T.C. in the penal sum of £1200 with condition to be void on payment of the said sum of £600 with interest for the same on March 1st, 1806."

"And whereas the said Samuel Curtis had possession given to him of the plates stock and materials belonging to the said work for the purpose of selling or continuing the publication thereof as he might think proper, but the said Samuel Curtis having neglected to pay and satisfy the said bond when the same became due" he proposed to the executors that he would give up to them the plates stock and materials then remaining to the said work or publication which the executors agreed to take back accordingly and whereas the said plates etc. were placed under the care of Susannah Curtis at Prospect Row and whereas the said George Graves hath agreed etc. with John Sims and Thomas Fothergill for the absolute purchase of the plates, stock etc. etc. with the copyright of *Flora Londinensis* and the sundry plates of plants, birds and insects and other subjects of Natural History . . . for the

sum of £390 . . . (and also for the consideration of 5/- to S. C.). The *Botanical Magazine* is specifically excepted.

The schedule above referred to consists of copper plates, copyright and materials of the *Materia Medica*. The copper plates of botanical subjects with the copyright and materials thereunto belonging. Two plates of insects with copyright and materials. Three ditto of birds with copyright and materials. All duly signed and sealed.

It will be seen from this that Samuel Curtis lost money on *Flora Londinensis*, and also that only two plates of insects and three of birds were handed to Graves. It is probable that William Curtis had many more which he hoped one day to use but never did and as Samuel is not known to have made use of them either, some were probably lost. The drawings of birds were no doubt by Sydenham Edwards and the insects by Moses Harris. A considerable number of the latter are, however, in the Museum at Alton.

In order to tell the full story it is necessary to give the gist of other agreements.

Assignment of interest in the *Flora Londinensis* etc. pursuant to an award.

Indenture 21st Oct. 1817 between John Harding of St. James Street, Mx. bookseller and G. Graves of Walworth, Surrey, gentleman. Whereas by mutual bonds dated July 25th last after reciting that they had been partners in the publication and sale of *F. L.* and some differences having arisen to dissolve partnership—they became mutually bound to each other in the personal sum of £3000 to stand to abide by, perform and fulfil etc. the order award etc. of Crosley George Lackington and Thomas Hurst.

That the said John Harding shall on or before Oct. 21st the next deliver to George Graves a good sufficient assignment of all his right title or interest in *F. L.* and a certain other work called *The Naturalist's Pocket Book*. Also that George Graves should pay to Harding £493 14 0 on or before 21st Oct. then next. copyright, stock etc. The signatures of John Harding and *George Graves* appear at the foot of this deed.

Indenture dated Oct. 23 1817 between George Graves and Anthony Sterry Assignment of copyright by way of Mortgage to Anthony Sterry George Graves of Walworth and Anthony Sterry of High Street, Borough of Southwark, citizen, in which G. G. has occasion for a loan of £500. Sterry agrees to lend the money at 5 p. cent. and G. G. gives as security all the stock and materials connected with *Flora Londinensis*.

Assignment of copyright by way of Mortgage is witnessed by Mary Sterry in the presence of Thomas Fothergill of Austin Friars.

Another agreement dated 28th March 1821 between George Graves now of Bath Place, Peckham, Surrey, gentleman, and Anthony Sterry, oilman of High Street, Southwark, William Sherwood, Samuel Dunbar Neely and Robert Jones all of Paternoster Row in the City of London, booksellers and co-partners; William Limbery Grosvenor the elder, Eliezer Chater, William Limbery Grosvenor the younger and Charles Rutt all of Cornhill in the said City, stationers and co-partners carrying on trade under the firm of Grosvenor, Chater and Company. Richard Taylor and Arthur Taylor both of Shoe Lane in the same City, printers and co-partners, and James Ramshaw of Fetter Lane in the same City, copper plate printer.

It appears that Graves had paid Sterry £300, but the sum of £210 including interest remained owing. But G. G. was also indebted to the above mentioned parties for the following amounts, viz.

Sherwood, Neely and Jones ...	£169	8	10
Grosvenor, Chater & Co. ...	64	10	0
James Ramshaw	51	17	2
R. & H. Taylor	104	9	0

For the payment of the sums owing Graves proposed to enter into an agreement by which, from time to time, he would deliver to Wm. Sherwood, Neely & Jones such coloured numbers of *F. L.* as they may require, being paid the sum of 3/- for the colouring of each number and that the said work be continued and published monthly or so often as the parties shall require, the materials nevertheless used in carrying out the same to be paid for by the said parties.

Anthony Sterry agrees to permit the use of copper plates (by virtue of mortgage on his property) upon his engaging to return them after use. Wm. Sherwood & Co. agree to sell the publications and stand possessed of the profits. Sterry to be paid interest on his mortgage. The remainder to be divided every three months between themselves and the other parties in proportion to their respective debts.

A. Sterry agrees to postpone repayment of the £200 now due for principal on the mortgage until the other parties are repaid. If at the expiration of two years the publication should not be sufficient to satisfy all debts, the same should be sold to the best advantage and the proceeds be applied first to pay A. Sterry by virtue of the mortgage, the residue to pay off the others. G. G. coming, of course, last of all.

To all this must be added the following notes.

“Received from the within named Anthony Sterry by the hands of George Graves 432 plates belonging to the old press of the *F. L.* and 72 plates to the new press of the same work which I hereby engage to return to the said Anthony Sterry on demand. Signed April 10, 1821. James Ramshaw, 33 Fetter Lane.”

“N. B. Sherwood sold his share to the other Trustees.”

“This agreement is cancelled by the partners having sold the *Flora* and equally dividing the proceeds at 3/6 in the £. A copy of which a/c is within—9th Mo. 1834.”

This seems to be as full an account of the *Flora Londinensis* transaction as is likely to be known, and shows clearly that every one concerned in it lost money.

George Graves was elected a Fellow of the Linnean Society on 17th March 1812, and Mr. Spencer Savage informs me that he withdrew from the Fellowship about the year 1834 owing the Society about £50 for annual contributions—a fact which will surprise no one who has read the foregoing account. The Linnean Society has but one letter of George Graves, dated 12th Feb. 1831, and this refers to his arrears of payment.

Points to be cleared up about George Graves are his reasons for departing to Edinburgh and the more important one of the date of his death.

It is possible that his removal to Edinburgh was brought about by one of his children having gone to reside there, and a scrap book bearing the name stamped in gilt lettering “Mary Ann Graves, Edinburgh”, seems to show that she went with her father. Samuel Curtis, who paid several visits to Scotland, had friends amongst gardeners and botanists in Edinburgh, and may perhaps have contributed to George’s leaving London.

A possible clue to the date of George’s death is contained in the account headed “George Graves to Sterry Sterry and Company” (no longer Anthony Sterry, oilman!). This concerns a policy for £1000 in the London Life Assurance. The first entry is dated June 2, 1839, and gives the amount of cash advanced at sundry times prior to this date. Then follows the amount of premiums paid by J. Sterry and subsequently by Graves’ executors from 1839 to 1862, viz., 23 years interest. In 1863 Sterrys receive £1000 from the London Life Assurance, but they estimate that they have lost £956 7s 0d on the transaction.

It would appear from this that Graves died on June 2, 1839.

Throughout his working life he was harassed by financial worries from which the proceeds of his publications never sufficed to free him. But in spite of this he and his wife brought up a family of eight children and so far as is known did well by them.