

CAPTAIN GEORGE AUGUSTUS GRAHAM REMEMBERED

On Friday 23rd October 2009 a group of approximately 100 people gathered in Dursley, Gloucestershire for a day of events to celebrate and remember the life and pioneering work of Captain George Augustus Graham (1833 – 1909) whose dedication places him at the forefront of the 19th century revival of the Irish Wolfhound.

Those who came together included several generations of the captain's descendants, devotees of the breed from Ireland, Scotland, England, Wales and Norway, accompanied by 10 wolfhounds and a saluki, as well as members of the local history society, representatives of the local community including the MP and mayor and governors, staff and students from the town's Rednock School which is named after and built on the site of Graham's home where he spent over 40 years pursuing a breeding programme by which he saved this giant hound from extinction.

The day began with a service in St Mark's Church conducted by Janet Bromley the Rector of Dursley who then rededicated the grave of the captain and his wife which had been beautifully and professionally restored by local stonemasons from L.W.Clutterbuck Ltd. The cost of this work was met by donations from the international Irish Wolfhound community who had responded to an appeal launched in 2007 by owner, breeder and exhibitor Dr Nicholas Wilkes (*Strickenoak*) of Northumberland. He had been moved to take action after reading an article by Dursley resident and local historian Andrew Barton in which the grave's sorry state of disrepair at the turn of the millennium was highlighted. This was so even though there had been a refurbishment of the grave in 1985 supported by the breed community.

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Exactly 100 years to the day after George Augustus Graham had been laid to rest and to the mournful lament of the Scottish pipes, a number of wreaths and flowers on behalf of his descendants, breed clubs and other interested parties were placed upon the grave. Regrettably unable to attend in person Jacqueline Carswell, President of the Irish Wolfhound Club of America, had sent a message acknowledging the common debt all those around the world who are associated with the breed owe to Graham for his efforts in preserving the Irish Wolfhound.

On leaving the graveyard the party, accompanied by a police escort, walked a short distance to St James Church in the centre of Dursley to view a number of memorials to the Graham family located inside and outside the parish church. The attending dogs, who had been allowed in both churches and the graveyard, posed for photographs on the grass outside the church before everyone made their way to Rednock School whose brand new state-of-the-art buildings were only opened this academic year.

After lunch in the adjacent community centre the visitors joined a unique school assembly during the course of which, with an Irish Wolfhound literally centre stage, Rory Webster a great grandson of Captain Graham, Andrew Barton and Nicholas Wilkes explained to the staff and students who the captain was, the significance of the site on which their school stood and the importance of Graham's role in the regeneration of the breed. To the skirl of the pipes Rory then unveiled a plaque commemorating Captain Graham, a man proud of his Scottish ancestry, prominently located in the school hall and paid for by the generosity of those who had contributed to the grave restoration appeal.

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A second and larger plaque, also paid for out of the donations, and which summarises the life and work of Captain Graham, across the text of which he and an Irish Wolfhound, gaze at each other in perpetuity was then unveiled by Dursley's mayor, Councillor Jane Ball. On the day this plaque was located in a temporary position outside the main entrance to the school but will be secured to the outside of the new sixth form block when it is completed and it will then be permanently sited close to the spot where Graham's house stood.

As school ended the Irish Wolfhounds present were mobbed by children, many of them no taller than the dogs, anxious to stroke and talk about such magnificent creatures. After many more photographs and the presentation of a commemorative rosette to each of the dogs, the gathering broke up. Some of the dogs, all of whom had behaved impeccably during the day, were taken for a well deserved stretch of the legs on neighbouring Cam Peak with its spectacular views over the surrounding countryside.

The day was both memorable and enjoyable, the weather favourable and the cause a worthy one. All those present agreed that the day had been a fitting tribute to Captain Graham whose legacy, the noble Irish Wolfhound, is, 100 years after his death, truly international.

Provided By: **Nicholas Wilkes**

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The small (first) plaque now sited in the hall of the new Rednock School, unveiled by Graham's great grandson Rory Webster on 23/10/09 and paid for out of the Appeal funds (courtesy of Kim Horsley)

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The procession from St Mark's Church on its way to St James Church, Dursley 23/10/09
(courtesy of Ben Wilkes)

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The dilapidated grave of Captain Graham and his wife in January 2008.
(courtesy of Andrew Barton)



The restored grave bedecked with wreaths and flowers 23/10/09
(courtesy of Ben Wilkes)

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Janet Bromley, Rector of Dursley rededicates the restored grave at St Mark's Church, Dursley 23/10/09
(courtesy of Ben Wilkes)

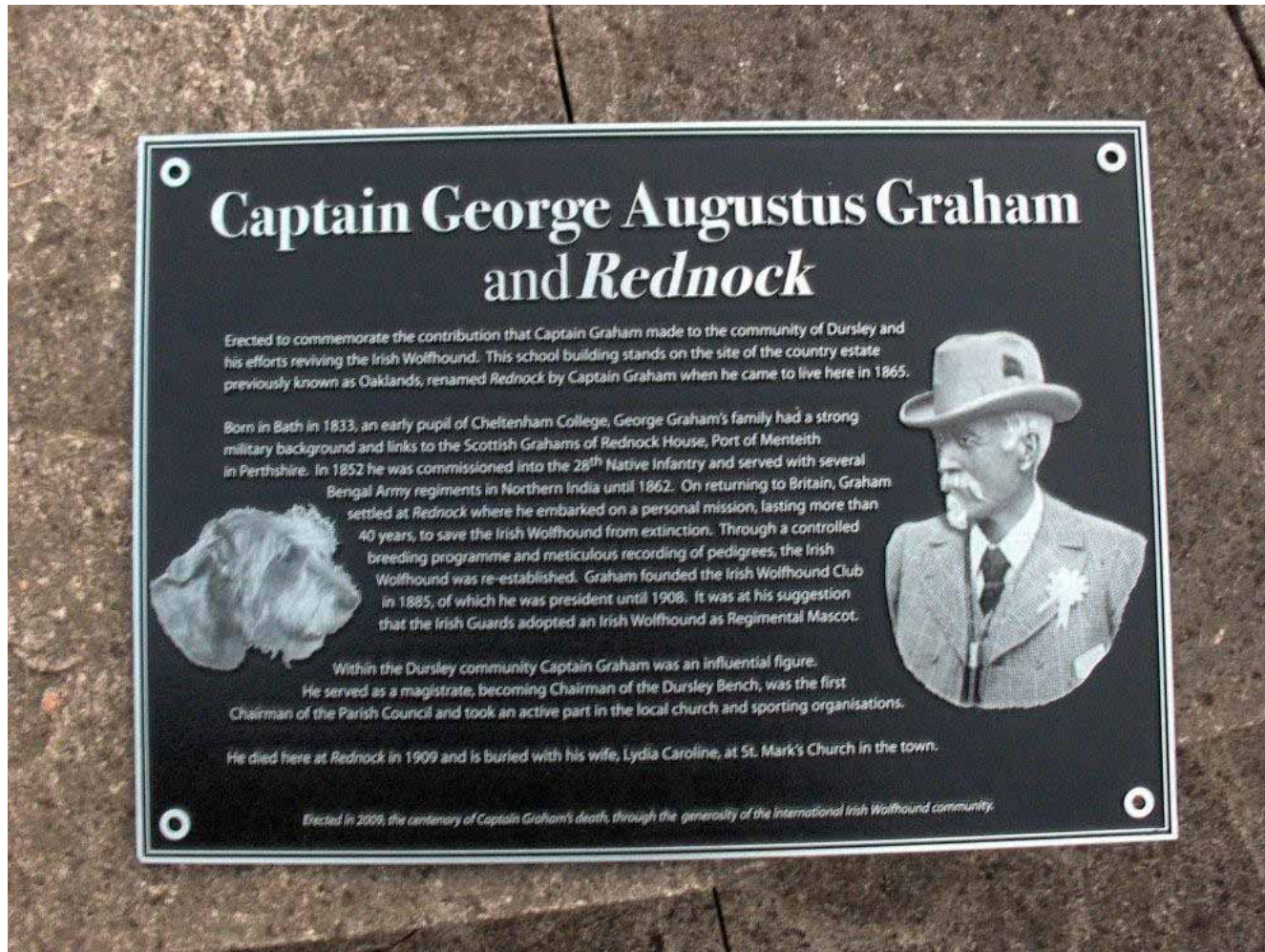
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The second plaque unveiled at Rednock School, Dursley 23/10/09.

From left to right: Dr Nicholas Wilkes with Irish Wolfhound Stricken oak Louise Marie, Rory Webster Captain Graham's great grandson, Andrew Barton, Councillor, Jane Ball, Mayor of Dursley and David Alexander headmaster. (courtesy of Carol Barton)

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The large (second) plaque, to be fixed on the outside of the new sixth form block at Rednock School once completed, where it will overlook the site of Graham's house. Unveiled by the Mayor of Dursley on 23/10/09 and paid for out of the Appeal funds (courtesy of Andrew Barton)

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All the dogs present on the day pose on the grass in front of St James Church 23/10/09
(courtesy of Chris Cook)

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The youngest Irish Wolfhound present sits at the foot of the grave 23/10/09
(courtesy of Chris Cook)