

The parish of Naseby contains some 3,300 acres and was for several hundreds of years divided into two estates, neither of which possessed a house of any size. The largest of these estates contained approximately 2,000 acres and the major part of the village, and was previously owned by various absentee landlords. It did, however, at one-time possess a building to the north of Clott Hill, which has been described as a 'Hall'. Of this nothing now remains and it is believed to have been demolished when the Manor Farm-house was built around 1760.

Exactly how the FitzGerald family came into the possession of the larger of these two estates is not altogether clear. John Mastin, in his History of Naseby, refers to them vaguely in his second edition, which was published in 1818. He does, however, mention that the Estate was conveyed by Sir John Wolstenholm to Charles Joye Esq. in about 1720 and by 1792 was in the possession of Sir Isaac Pocock, in the right of his lady, Dame Ann, the relic of Peter Joye Esq of Bennefield. The Manor of Naseby Court Leet and Court Baron clearly show that Dame Ann was still being represented when the court convened as late as 19th April 1817. When Dame Ann died around 1817/18, she may have bequeathed the Naseby Manor to John FitzGerald who in turn died shortly afterwards leaving it to his daughter and only heiress, Mary Frances.

The Shuckburgh family had owned the smaller of the two estate of some 1000 acres, including most of the houses in Church Street, during the 16th and 17th centuries. They ran out of the male line and the last female married into the Ashby family of Quenby Hall in Leicestershire. This estate remained in possession of the Ashby family until 1905, although until 1855 not one of them had lived on it for some 200 years. The old family seat of the Shuckburghs, that stood opposite the church, was demolished during 1773 and rebuilt as a farmhouse. Both estates were obviously managed by stewards or bailiffs, and both were broken up after the First World War.

The FitzGerald family were said to have descended from an Anglo-Norman family that had lived in Ireland for more than six centuries. They were Protestants and immensely rich. In fact, by the simple expediency of marrying close relations they had become one of the most wealthy and influential families in the whole of Ireland, as well as being one of the most eccentric. They were also known for their haughtiness, intelligence and complete disregard for any opinion save that of their own.

Mary Frances FitzGerald was born 19th June 1777, the daughter of John FitzGerald Esq. of Little Island, County Waterford and Mary, only daughter of Keane FitzGerald Esq. who it is believed were first cousins.

Mary Frances also married her first cousin, John Purcell Esq in 1801. He was born in Dublin 25th December 1775, the eldest son of John Purcell Esq. M.D., a wealthy physician of Richmond Hill, Dublin, and Eleanor, eldest daughter of John FitzGerald of Little Island, County Waterford.



JOHN PURCELL

John Purcell junior was a graduate of Trinity Collage, Dublin, and although he had enrolled in the Inner Temple he did not take up a legal career, preferring to live the life of a typical country squire.

Mary Frances has been described as a big, slightly shapeless woman with strong sloping shoulders, intimidating bust, haughty chin, lovely violet eyes, dark auburn hair, long even nose, and a rather small mouth. A boatman, who in later years helped to row her in a barge across to her family seat at Little Island on the River Suir, observed that she was 'a fine woman...a fine broad woman.'

THE FITZGERALDS OF NASEBY

By Mike Westaway



MARY FRANCES FITZGERALD

For the first nine years of their married life the Purcells' main residence was 'The White House' at Bredfield in Suffolk (also known as Bredfield House and Bredfield Hall), which they rented for several years from a Squire Jennings.

Mary Frances's father, who saw it as a suitable property in which to raise a family, had given them the nearby Boulge Hall Estate as a wedding present. He had purchased it on the condition that the late owner's elderly widow, a Mrs Short, could remain there until she died. Short by name she may have been, but not by nature, the old lady lived much longer than had been expected, thus preventing them from moving into the house for a further 30-odd years. John Purcell also owned Castle Irwell at Pendleton near Manchester, a small country residence that at that time was in a poor state of repair and not considered suitable as a family home.

Eight children were born to the Purcells during the nine years they lived as a family at The White House in Bredfield. They were John, Frances, Andalusia, Peter Kingsley, Mary Eleanor, Jane Teresa, Edward and Isabella. John was the eldest boy and Frances was the eldest girl. Edward was the youngest boy but the exact order of the other children is uncertain.

In 1810, Mary Frances had inherited a fortune of some £700,000 and several English estates from a great aunt. From that time onward, following in the footsteps of her own parents, she and her husband lived increasingly separate lives. Mary Frances spent most of her time in London mixing with the high society of the day while John remained with the children at Bredfield House in Suffolk. With their mother spending most of her time in London, paying only infrequent visits to Suffolk, and their father busy pursuing the pheasant and the fox, the children were left in the hands of governesses and tutors. Edward describes how, as a small child, he had watched in awe as his mother on one of her infrequent visits to Bredfield House arrived from London in a splendid glittering yellow carriage drawn by four matching black horses followed by other carriages, full servants and mounds of luggage.

. The Purcells were to remain at Bredfield House for several more years before moving during 1825 to Wherstead Lodge, a short distance from Ipswich, overlooking the Orwell estuary. This was also a rented property belonging to Sir Robert Harland. It has never been fully explained why it was that with all the houses they owned, until Mrs Short died and John could finally move into Boulge Hall, they persisted in living in rented accommodation.

After the death of her brother in 1807 who, incidentally, was also named John as were her grandfather, father and eldest son, Mary Frances became the sole heiress to her father's Irish and English estates. With the money and properties she inherited from her great aunt and those of her father, which included the Naseby estate when he died in 1818, she became one of the wealthiest commoners in the country. For reasons best known to themselves, around the time of her father's death, John and Mary Frances Purcell, along with their children, took her maiden name, and from that time onward became known as FitzGerald. It is also interesting to note that although she was still only 31 years of age no more children were born after she inherited her aunt's fortune,

From 1826 to 1832 John FitzGerald senior served as a Member of Parliament for Sleaford in Sussex. He was commissioned as Lieutenant Colonel of the East Suffolk Second Corps Volunteers, and also served as High Sheriff and as Deputy Lieutenant for the County of Suffolk

Although there is a common misconception that during this time a husband controlled his wife's money, it certainly was not true in the case of the FitzGeralds. It appears that both Mary Frances and her trustees were aware of her husband's remarkable lack of business acumen and ensured that between them they retained full control of the FitzGerald fortune. John FitzGerald, as he was by this time known, was frequently making bad investments or being embezzled by his stewards. At least two of them absconded with over ten thousand pounds of rent. He was at one stage declared bankrupt when a futile attempt to mine coal on his property at Pembleton in 1843 resulted in failure after it became flooded

As there was not a house of any size on the Naseby Estate the FitzGeralds had one built. Exactly when the house was completed is not known but it is believed to have been between 1819 and 1822 although, as it is not actually shown on the Enclosure Award Map, it may have been later. Nor, for that matter, is it known why that particular spot was chosen, as it is tucked into a distant corner of both the estate and the parish. With some 2,000 acres to choose from the choice seems rather an odd one. The parcel of land upon which it was built covered some 250 acres, cut off to the north and east from the rest of their estate by land owned by George Ashby Maddock. To the south and west of the house are the Cold Ashby and Sulby parish boundaries, the latter only a few yards from the front door. It may have been that the land in that part of the parish was the least productive, or that to have built it elsewhere would have had a disruptive effect upon the old three-field system of farming still being carried out in the parish at that time. If that was the case, why not have waited until the parish was enclosed in 1823 and the land divided into compact farms, then they could have built on any part of their land that they chose. Whatever the reason, it is said that Mary Frances did not approve of it once it had been built and stayed there only once. Even if this was not so, with all their other properties it is very unlikely that the FitzGeralds occupied it for any length of time. In fact there is much anecdotal evidence to suggest that it was leased to several different tenants during the time of the FitzGeralds' ownership. The house which was enclosed in some 60 acres of gardens, parkland and woods was called 'The Woolleys' after the piece of ground upon which it stood.

Another structure erected by them was, of course, the Obelisk. This was built on a former mill mound on the Clipston Road in 1823. Although its position is some way to the east of where the heaviest fighting took place it stands where the New Model Army, under General Fairfax, originally formed up on the morning of June 14th. It is also on the highest piece of ground in the parish. At the time it was built the enclosures were only just taking place, which meant that without hedges and trees the vista was far more open than it is today, so that much more of the battlefield could be seen.

As well as building the Woolleys and the obelisk it was the FitzGeralds, being the major landowners, who were the driving force behind the parish being enclosed during 1822-3. The other landowner, George Ashby-Maddock, who owned the remaining 1,000 acres in right of his wife Hannah Maria, heiress of the Shuckburgh/Ashby inheritance, was at that time residing at Haselbech which, like all the parishes surrounding Naseby, had been enclosed many years previously.

Around 1824, the local Methodist Society, which had thrived in Naseby for several years, applied to the FitzGeralds for a piece of land upon which to build their Chapel. This was duly granted and the Chapel was built at the junction of Gynwell and Church Street the following year. The Society claimed to offer, besides preaching and fellowship, a focal point of opposition to the established order of squire and parson. This opposition was to manifest itself on and off for at least the next 150 years. It should be pointed out that the FitzGeralds were not Patrons of the Benefice and so had no strong ties with the church. This title was attached to the Ashby Estate so the Methodists were not really biting the hand that fed them.

From a copy of a conveyance dated 6th June 1844, it would appear that the FitzGeralds also gave the piece of ground upon which the school and head teacher's residence were built. This was obviously to replace the old one that stood in Pikes Lane, which is believed to have, at one time, run from the High Street behind the houses on the south side of School Lane to the top of Gynwell.

Conditions laid down in the conveyance ensured that the school to be erected was for the 'education of children of labouring, manufacturing and other poorer classes in the parish of Naseby'. It also states that the school should be under the control of the vicar and church-wardens. In other words, it was to be a Church of England school. The conveyance contains the signatures of all the FitzGerald family that were alive at that time, including those of their sons-in-law.



THE BELL INN PUBLIC HOUSE

The large stone cross that stands in the north-west corner of the Churchyard, adjacent to the north gate, has also been attributed to the FitzGerald family. It is thought to have been put there as a replacement for the old market cross that once stood on the green and was moved to the junction of the Haselbech and Clipston roads when the green was reduced in size at the time of the enclosures. The FitzGerald Arms was also built before the estate changed hands. This was to replace the old Bell Inn, which stood immediately in front of the new building, running parallel to the road.

John FitzGerald Junior, the heir to the FitzGerald fortune, took a keen interest in the spiritual well being of his parents' tenants. It is said that in the company of the Rev. Timothy Matthews, an

Evangelical preacher from Bedford, he held several open-air temperance meetings on the green between the church and the FitzGerald Arms. This poses the question as to why, if he was so concerned about the drinking habits of the villager, did he allow the public house to remain open, let alone to be rebuilt?

In 1843, again in the company of the Reverend Matthews, he baptised 19 people in Naseby Reservoir with an audience of some 1500 people looking on.

Both John and Edward had been frequent visitors to Naseby as they were both involved in running the family estates. Edward probably more so than John as he took a greater interest in the farming methods of the day and, at one time, was personally responsible for running the farms on the Boulge Hall Estate.



THE FITZGERALD ARMS PUBLIC HOUSE IN THE LATE 19TH CENTURY WHICH REPLACED THE BELL INN

Where John stayed during his visits to Naseby is not known but Edward, in his letters which were published at the turn of the last century, frequently mentions that he lodged with tenant farmers, which adds strength to the belief that the Woolleys was tenanted. In fact the 1851 census shows that at that time it was occupied by a Mr Crump, a retired merchant from Liverpool. It is through Edward's letters that it has been possible to learn a little about his family involvement during their ownership of the Woolleys estate. The research he carried out for Carlyle on the Naseby battlefield during 1842 and the subsequent correspondence between them is also particularly interesting to historians.

It is probably through his translation of the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám that Edward is the best known member of the FitzGerald family. Although born into an immensely wealthy family he is said to have lived a simple, almost frugal, existence on the fringe of the Victorian literary world. Tennyson, Thackeray and Carlyle were amongst his closest friends. An eccentric, like most of his relations, he is quoted as saying that 'all his family were mad but he had an advantage over them as he knew that he was insane'. For most of his adult life Edward lived either in lodgings at Cambridge or at various houses around Ipswich and, for some 15 years, at the Gatehouse of Boulge Hall, looked after by an elderly housekeeper. Although a homosexual, in 1856 he married a Miss Lucy Barton, the daughter of an old friend. Predictably the marriage proved to be a disaster and lasted only a matter of months.



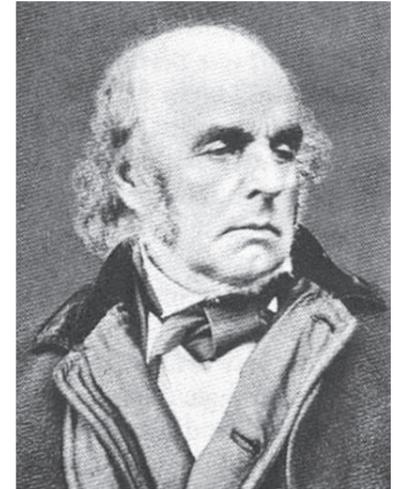
JOHN PURCELL-FITZGERALD

On the death of her husband during 1852, Mary Frances made Boulge Hall over to her son, John, who from that time with his second wife Hester made it their main residence. His first wife, Augusta Jane Lisle, the only daughter of C. March Phillips Esq. of Garenden Park and Grace Dieu Manor in Leicestershire had died on 30th July 1837.

Mary Frances died at her house in The Royal Crescent, Brighton on 30th January 1855 aged 76, leaving the bulk of her fortune to John who shortly afterwards added his father's surname to his own to become known as John Purcell FitzGerald. The same year he sold the Naseby estate to Viscount Clifden of Holdenby House, thereby ending the FitzGerald's connection with Naseby.

Peter Kingsley FitzGerald, of whom little is known apart from the fact that he served in the army and that his address on the Naseby School deeds was Ballysax, County Kildare, Ireland, died of bronchitis in 1875. John Purcell FitzGerald died at Boulge Hall on 14th June 1879. Edward FitzGerald died 4th June 1883 aged 75 while visiting his old friend, the Reverend George Crabb, at Merton near Bury St Edmunds.

Of the FitzGerald daughters, even less is known. Frances, the eldest daughter, died in London on 19th June 1820 aged 18, presumably unmarried. Mary Eleanor, who



EDWARD FITZGERALD TRANSLATOR OF THE RUBÁIYÁT OF OMAR KHAYYÁM

was married to a John Kerrich of Geldstone Hall in Norfolk, died during 1863. Andalusia, a spinster, died in 1879. Jane Teresa, who was married to the Reverend John Brewster Wilkinson, of Halbrook near Ipswich, died some time after 1879. It is not known when Isabella, who married Gaetano Francisco Vignali, a penniless Italian teacher, died or even where she is buried.



ST MICHAEL'S AND ALL ANGELS CHURCH, BOULGE, SUFFOLK WHERE THE FITZGERALD FAMILY IS BURIED.

Bredfield House and Boulge Hall have long since been demolished. All that now remains are a small group of houses and the church of St Michael and All Angels where many of the FitzGerald's are buried in the family mausoleum. The church stands in a rather remote rural setting, accessible by a narrow track. Although the entire parish of Boulge has a population of less than 30 souls, the church is beautifully maintained.



THE FITZGERALD MAUSOLEUM, BOULGE.

At his own request, Edward was not buried with his family but in a grave close by because, as he said, 'he did not get on with them in life and did not wish to be associated with them when dead.'



THE GRAVE OF EDWARD FITZGERALD, BOULGE

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