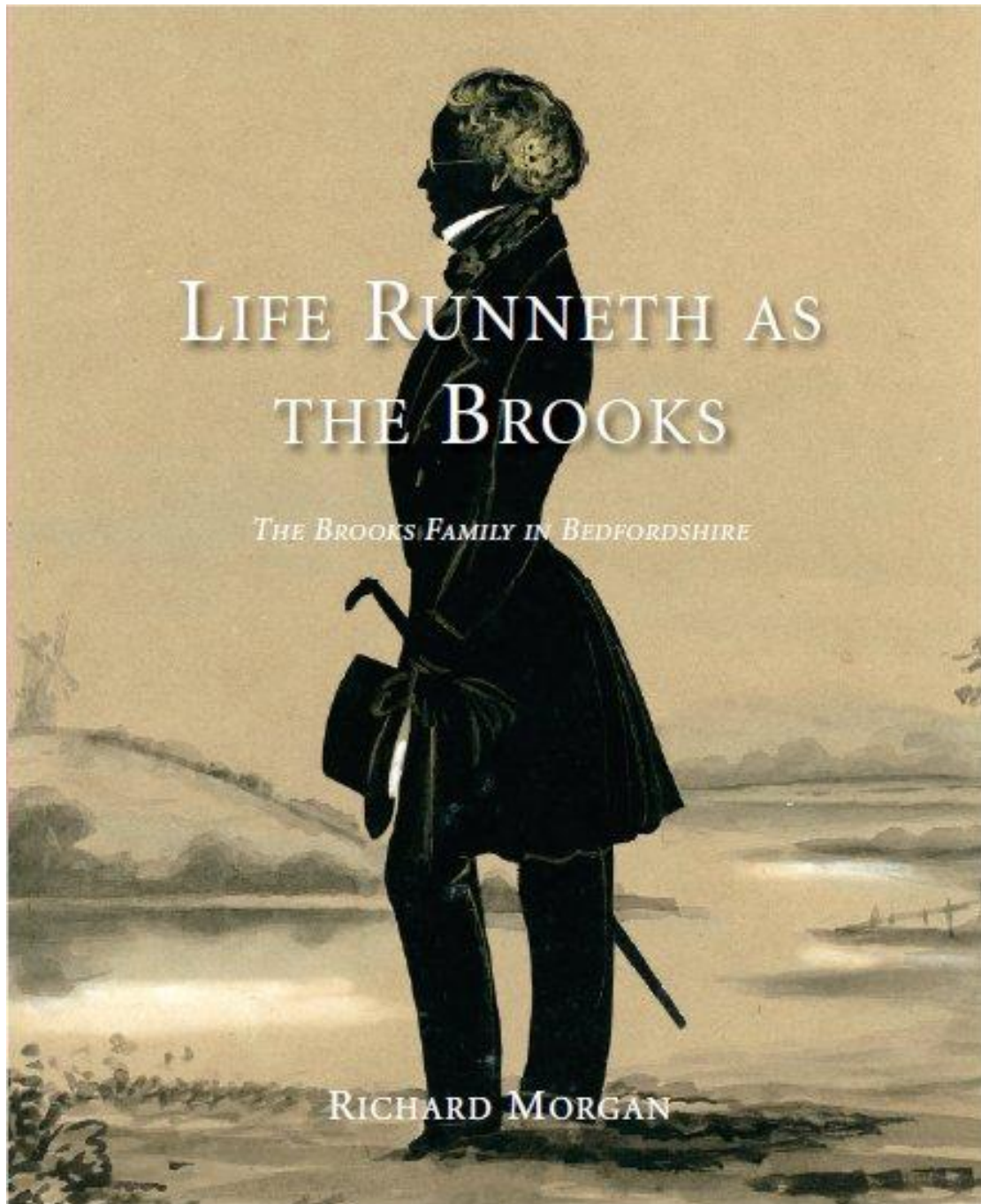


Review of the book LIFE RUNNETH AS THE BROOKS by Richard Morgan.



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The Brooks family of Flitwick – review article¹

This book tells the story of the Brooks – gentry at the heart of Bedfordshire and Flitwick village life – from the mid-18th century to 1934. Using their diaries, letters, sketches and photos Richard Morgan, a regular contributor to HIB, has reconstructed their lives.

This is a sumptuous publication, produced on behalf of the author. Published in a numbered and strictly limited edition of 150 copies, it is in a quarto format (270 x 210mm), with 259 printed text pages, an additional 16 pages of illustrations, and is case-bound with a dust jacket. A good coated paper is used and the flatback cased binding

is in *real* red bookcloth, blocked in gold on the front and spine. The jacket has an interesting and unusual design but to my mind is slightly dull on the front, though colour is used on the back.

We have to ask whether bringing the history of the Bedfordshire Brookses to the public is best served by this type of publication, rather than a cheaper and more accessible production. Of course, the size of the market (and thus the number of copies to print) determines this decision – we hope Richard's view is the correct one.

Typesetting is from the author's PC and does not allow for too many typographical niceties, but it is neat and tidy and free from misprints. The line on a page as wide as this for ease of reading should not usually be wider than 15cm: this line is 17cm, but the lines are quite well spaced.

The book is a readable academic treatise with the text fully supported by extensive footnotes at the *foot* of the page, rather than endnotes at the *end* of the book (which are inconvenient, and usually ignored).

The title pages have a detailed contents, list of illustrations (detailing the 27 illustrations in the book), a list of abbreviations which is combined with a general bibliography, and tables of law cases and statutes.

The text has five Parts and contains 11 chapters. The first chapter, numbered '0' ('The Dark Ages – Flitwick Manor to 1764'), results from the author finding the early records of Flitwick Manor confused and fragmentary and having no clear account until 1764. The line is traced from the medieval de Fletwyk family through Dunstable Priory and after alienation by the Crown through the successive families of Blofeld (c1550–1668), Rhodes (1668–1735), to Dr Dell (1735–64), who died probably unmarried and left Flitwick to his goddaughter, Ann Fisher. In 1778 Ann married James Hesse, who died in 1783, and then George Brooks in 1789 (see HIB, Vol 5, Nos 6 and 7). Chapter 1 follows on from Dr Dell telling of the 'Ancien Régime – Flitwick Manor 1764–89': the Fisher family from 1764–68 and the Hesse family from 1778–89.

The origins of the Brooks family are traced in Chapter 2, 'The Uses of Patronage 1660–1789'. From fairly humble origins in Boxford, Suffolk, the brothers John and George Brooks were presented to Christ's Hospital school by, among others, Bishop Johnson, who had a connection with them, and later, for George, the Bishop of Durham, for whom he worked. George Brooks later became a barrister and banker in London. George Brooks' first wife, Ann, died in 1784 and he married Ann Hesse in 1789 and thus the Brookses came to Bedfordshire. George's brother, Captain John Brooks, RN, came to live at Biddenham and owned over 200 acres. His daughter, Elizabeth, married William Moore at Biddenham in 1811; he died in 1823 and she married William Golding in 1825, giving rise to a tailpiece to this chapter on the Moores and the Goldings.

'Getting and Spending 1789–1836' is the title of Part II and Chapter 3 is about 'George Brooks in London and Bedfordshire 1789–1817'. He had inherited Flitwick Manor, but let it out. He kept a close eye on the estates but continued to live in London, in some state in Twickenham, and, in 1806, initiated enclosure of the village. George and John became governors of Christ's Hospital in 1786 and George used his influence to get both his sons, John and Tom, into Christ Church, Oxford, John becoming a barrister. Tom went for a Cornetcy in the 14th Dragoons in 1815 but, in the same year, left the army. On Tom's marriage in 1816 George settled Flitwick Manor (although it was still let) plus land in Flitwick, Maulden and Higham Gobion on Tom. The author devotes a section to the tenants of Flitwick Manor at this time and George took in hand the accounts of the estate. George, although in London, became High Sheriff of Bedfordshire in 1796, his

son and grandson would follow him in this. The author also recounts the fortunes of the Hesse daughters from the first marriage of George's wife. The stories of the Maulden Enclosure, led by the Duke of Bedford and not completed until 1803, and the Flitwick Enclosure, which was completed in 1807, are told as are the disturbances at Flitton in 1772, relating to the Maulden enclosure.

At the age of 72, George wrote a long letter to his son Tom, giving his views on religion and morality and most of this is printed. George's politics are discussed: he would seem to have been a floating voter but did help in a successful campaign to elect John Osborn as an independent (i.e., against the Duke of Bedford) member for the county in 1794. George Brooks died on 3 April 1817 and extracts from his will, and the family bible, plus his memorial in Stoke Poges church are reproduced. George's widow, Ann, died in 1 January 1834 and was buried in the Maulden vault with her first husband and infant children.

Chapter 4 covers 'The Model Estate 1816–36'. The manor house before Tom Brooks is described and also from when Tom took over in 1816, as are the improvements he made – a music room with an organ of 448 pipes and a further 175 swell pipes; a mainly natural history museum; an armoury and plant houses. A kitchen garden was created in 1818 and a Prospect Tower in 1825. The road which ran between the house and the church was diverted to the north of the church and the old road to Westoning which was closed in 1808 by the enclosure became a grand avenue of Chestnut trees most of which still survive. There is much on the lodges, gardens, including a botanic garden, and produce. Improvement costs are looked at and Tom's accounts for 1836 are reproduced and examined. There are sections on the costs of capital work from 1825–32, and the Flitwick Riot of 6 December 1830, related to the earlier national 'Captain Swing' disturbances. Indoors and outdoors servants and methods of travelling are considered. The comments of visitors to the estate are recounted and there is a tailpiece on the Brooks arms – never authorised by the College of Heralds.



Croquet at Flitwick Manor in the late 1870s

Part III is 'The Old Squire and The Young Squire 1822–85', and Chapter 5, 'The Old Squire at Home 1822–58' details the lives of Tom's children for all of whom he tried to provide a good education. Mary Ann (1822–48) unfortunately died at the age of 26. Like her father she was very interested in botany and did good work in the community. Johnnie's life from 1824 to 1843 is told. He went to Rugby under Dr Arnold and then studied for a commission in the 1st Bengal Light Cavalry, leaving for India in February 1843. George was intended for the law and from 1839 went to Doctors' Commons to be matriculated as a proctor in ecclesiastical law which he achieved in 1848 and he married in 1853. Willie went up to Christ Church, Oxford, in 1844 and was ordained in 1852 from whence his father set about buying the living at Flitwick for him. Tom raised £2,850 for the purchase and Willie became the vicar in 1855. By the end of his life Tom,

'by a mixture of tenacity, patronage and cash – got all three sons into good professions'.

Social life is covered, showing the family's interest in drawing and painting, dancing and balls. Tom had no interest in the magistracy but enthusiasm for the new Poor Law by serving on the Board of Guardians for Ampthill. His use of his right of presentation as a governor of Christ's Hospital and his views on religion and relations with Mr Dawson, vicar of Flitwick, are related as are Tom's politics (Conservative), and his financial help for a Flitwick school.

At this point there is a 16-page illustrations section, consisting mainly of portraits of family members, some in colour, but most in monochrome. There are intriguing pictures of the manor in the 1770s and the 1850s and of Flitwick Church End, the Green and the blacksmith's shop.

Chapter 6, 'Between Two Squires 1858–63' tells us of Johnnie's first meeting with and marriage to Sophie Cloete in the Cathedral in Calcutta on 23 December 1851 and also of the marriage settlement, which left Tom with a considerable financial problem. One way out was for Tom to settle Flitwick on Johnnie, but Johnnie had to return to India so the handover could not take place. The Brookses adopted Sophie's Cloete nieces, Sophie and Cora. Tom Brooks died on 22 December 1858 while Johnnie was in India and in the meantime Tom's widow, Mary Brooks, took over. The transfer of the estate to Johnnie and his leaving the Indian Army (he had to return to India to do so) took five years but by May 1863 all was settled and he assumed his duties. The marriage settlement took longer and it is unclear if it was ever resolved.

Chapter 7, 'The Young Squire at Home 1863–1885', tells of his love of amateur dramatics both for friends and the village. Johnnie liked Turkish baths and went to them in London, and, amazingly, in Maulden, and in India and in Cairo. A freemason in India, he lapsed until the creation of Ampthill Lodge in 1894. He served on the Ampthill Bench from 1863–1905, when he was 83, and joined the Board of Guardians in 1872. In 1860 Johnnie became the Captain of the 5th Bedfordshire (Ampthill) Company Rifle Volunteers and he was an 'indefatigable' Vicar's churchwarden and provided land to extend the churchyard. His interest in the village schools was 'hands on'.

Part IV concerns 'Three Improvident Clergymen 1803–1908' and Chapter 8 deals with them. The Reverend George William Brooks, 1803–71, was the second son of John Brooks, the banker, and grandson of George Brooks. Educated at Westminster School and Christ Church, Oxford, in 1827 he became rector of Great Kimble and Great Hampden in Buckinghamshire. There is much on the state of the parish and investigations into the alleged grave of John Hampden in the church. In 1839 he transferred his parish to the Rev Charles Lloyd, because he was in debt. By 1844 he had followed the well-worn trail of indigent Englishmen to Boulogne-sur-Mer, in France, to live cheaply, becoming the priest in charge of the Upper Town Chapel until 1849. He died at Scarborough in 1871.

Thomas William Dell Brooks (Willie) (1828–1908) was born at Flitwick, the son of Tom Brooks. He married his cousin, Harriette, elder daughter of the Rev G W Brooks (above), and became a very modern vicar of Flitwick. He restored the church in 1857 and 1867 and this and other innovations are described. The brothers Johnnie (lord of the manor) and the vicar got on, but their wives disliked one another, leading to disagreement. The vicar got into debt, like his father-in-law, and, like him, was able, in 1880, to move to Great Hampden where, as rector, he put in hand the restoration of the church in 1881 and 1884 and helped to provide an infants' school in 1886. He stayed until 1896 and then returned to Flitwick, finally removing to Bedford where died in 1908.

The third improvident clergyman was Thomas Beach Whitehurst (1800–80), Tom Brooks' brother-in-law, having married Jane Hatfield, the sister of Tom's wife, Mary. He was curate at Sundon and Minister at Streatley until 1836 but by 1840 was living in Ampthill, not undertaking any parish work but was a magistrate. In 1853 he moved to Leamington Spa. His daughter's husband tried to recoup money from a family trust which Whitehurst had embezzled. The matter ended in Chancery, but the final result is not known. At age 70 Whitehurst took up parish work again. He died in 1880.

Part V covers the twilight years of the Brookses, 1853–1934 and, in Chapter 9, scandals surrounding George Henry Brooks and Jack Brooks (1859–1919), who had an affair with the former's second wife (his aunt), which went through the courts in 1891. But 10 years later he married an ineligible village girl. May Brooks (1862–1926), Jack's sister, had an unhappy marriage, and eventually eloped with one of Jack's friends. Alice Jane (Tiny) Brooks (1864–1943) also married badly spending her retirement booking into European hotels and 'doing a runner' when the bills had to be paid. These scandals decided Johnnie and his daughter Kate that the Manor should not be left to George and Willie's branches of the family.

There is a Tailpiece to Chapter 9 on J W Brooks and the Flitwick Artists.

Chapter 10 covers Kate and the end of the Flitwick Brookses, 1885–1934. Kate and Minnie were Johnnie's daughters. Minnie married in 1884 Edgar Francis Jenkins but within a year died of kidney disease with her unborn child. Johnnie's wife Sophie died in 1897 and Johnnie in 1907. Kate, unmarried, ran the estate from about 1905 and her good works in the village are described. The poor state of repair of the manor house and the value of the estate up to Kate's death in 1934 are detailed.

The epilogue tells of events after Kate left the estate to her cousin Colonel Robert Lyall who broke the entail and acquired the freehold. After his death (in 1948) the Lyall family put the manor up for sale in 1953.²

Brooks, Hatfield and Cloete, Golding and Moore pedigrees and those of the patrons: Cuthbert, Johnson, Durham; Trevor, Hampden, Hobart; and Egerton finish the book, followed by a comprehensive Index.

This book is an immensely satisfying chronicle of a Bedfordshire manor and family over most of two centuries and with its wealth of minutely researched detail makes them and their lives, their home and their personalities come alive in the reader's mind: highly recommended.

TED MARTIN

Notes

1. *Life Runneth as The Brookses: The Brooks Family in Bedfordshire*, by Richard Morgan. Hardback. ISBN: 978-1904289-71-5. (Pagoda Tree Press, 4 Malvern Buildings, Fairfield Park, Bath BA1 6JX. Tel/Fax: 01225 463552. E-mail:sales@pagodatreepress.com). £60, plus postage at cost.

2. It passed through a number of owners until converted into a hotel in the 1980s. The adjacent land did not sell in 1953 and was sold for housing some years later. The main park was purchased by Flitwick Council in 2004 to be a recreational space.

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