

HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

KILL HISTORY GROUP



JOHNSTOWN OLD GRAVEYARD

This old graveyard is situated at the northern entrance to the village of Johnstown and surrounds the ruins of a medieval nave and chancel church dedicated to St John of Jerusalem, from which the village takes its name. The church, and surrounding lands, were held by the Knights Hospitallers (who were an order of medieval knights), until the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 1540s.

Many members of the local landlords and aristocracy are buried in the graveyard, including those of the Bourkes, who were Lords of Naas and Earls of Mayo. Perhaps the most famous of these was Richard Southwell Bourke (1822-1872) who was appointed Chief Secretary for Ireland three times in the 19th century, being known as “The Boy Secretary” because of his relative youth (30) when first appointed. The zenith of his political career came with his appointment, by Prime Minister Disraeli, as Viceroy of India in 1868. Four years into his term of appointment however, he was stabbed to death by a prisoner in the Andaman islands. After lying in state in Calcutta his body was shipped back to Ireland, reputedly in a barrel of rum (for preservative purposes). This has given rise to his local sobriquet of “The Pickled Earl”.