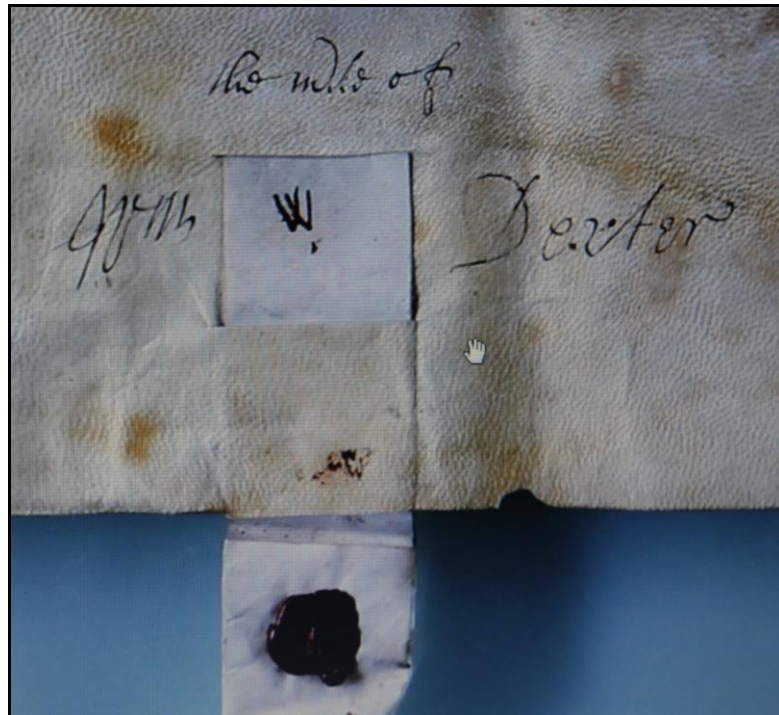


**WILLIAM DEXTER AND HIS WIFE MARY  
OF GRIFFITH DAM**



**BY SAMUEL T STEWART - NOVEMBER 2021**

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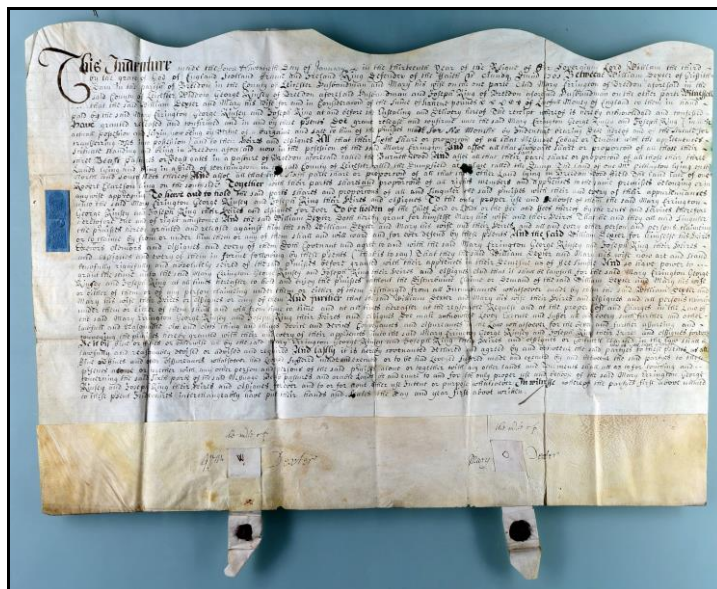
William Dexter is a gentleman of interest when it comes to the history of Griffydham.

The earliest reference found to William Dexter is in a "release" indenture held at the L&RRO (ref DE1536/77), dated 24th January 1701/2 The lease part, usually a small document, is not available, although that is unlikely to provide us with any further useful information as usually this only reflected the release document. The lease and release was the most popular and widespread way to record simple sales of property from the seventeenth century up to 1845. Releases were themselves abolished in 1845 and replaced by a simple 'grant', later known as a "conveyance." The release document refers to William Dexter and his wife Mary being resident in **Griffith Dam** which appears to be the name commonly used around this time for the village now known as Griffydham.

William Dexter (b.1662) married Mary Jones (b.1664) and they had 10 children - William, Francis, Thomas, Anne, Gregory, John, George, Mary, Edward and Richard.

The author has transcribed the original document into modern English and there follows the first part of this in italics. It basically deals with release of the land, messuage, tenements and their appurtenances by William Dexter and his wife Mary (Jones). It is extremely complicated to the uninitiated, not helped by the fact that no punctuation was used.

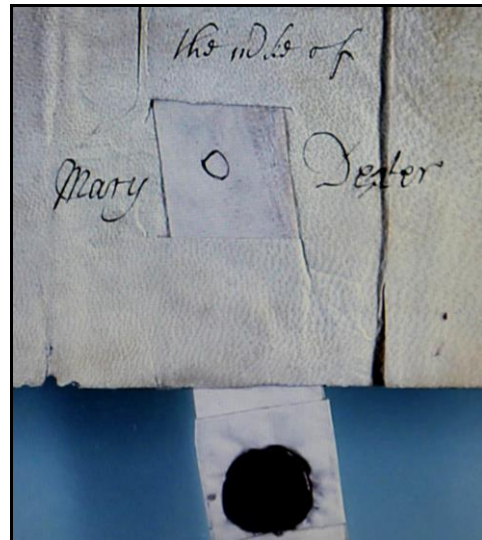
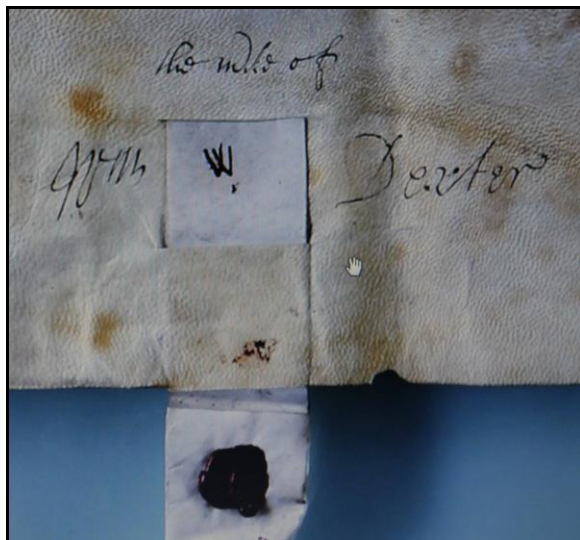
Lawyers in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were paid by the line. Therefore the longer and bolder a deed was, the more they got paid. There can be a lot of words in a lease and release (particularly in a release) which are not really necessary to read in order to get the gist of the transaction. Luckily, legal clerks usually marked the beginning of new and important phrases by highlighting or increasing the size of the initial word. This makes the lengthy deed easier to follow. This was not the case here unfortunately.



***THE INDENTURE:*** This indenture made in the fourth and twentieth day of January and in the thirteenth year of the reign of our sovereign Lord, William the Third by the Grace of God in England, Scotland, France and Ireland, King, defender of the faith Anno Domini 1701 between William Dexter of Griffith Dam in the parish of Breedon,

*in the County of Leicester, Husbandman, and Mary his wife on the one part, and Mary Errington of Breedon aforesaid in the said county of Leicester, Widow, George Kinsey of Breedon aforesaid, Husbandman, and Joshua King of Breedon aforesaid Husbandman on the other part, witnesseth that the said William Dexter and Mary his wife for and in consideration of the sum of sixteen pounds of lawful money of England to them in hand paid by the said Mary Errington, George Kinsey and Joseph King at and before the ensealing and delivery first of the receipt whereof, and is hereby acknowledged and confessed have granted released and confirmed and in and by these present do grant release and confirm unto the said Mary Errington, George Kinsey and Joseph King in their actual possession and seisin now being by virtue of a bargain and sale to him of the premises made for 6 months by indenture bearing does hereof and of the statute transferring uses into possession and to their heirs and assigns all that their sixth share or proportion of all that messuage or tenement and of appurtenances situate standing and being in Breedon aforesaid now in possession of the said Mary Errington and also all that sixth part share or proportion of all those their three best pastures or best gates in a pasture of Breedon aforesaid called the Burnett Wood and also all that their sixth part share or proportion of all those their lands lying and being in a field of Worthington in the said county of Leicester called the Dumpfield at a place called the Dump, the land of one called Mr. Pillington, lying on the north and south sides thereof and all that their sixth part share or proportion of all that their other land lying in Breedon Wood Field, the land late of one Robert Clarkson lying on the south side together with their parts shares and proportions of all rights and messuages and appurtenances to the same premises belonging or in any wise applying to have and to hold the said parts shared and proportions of all and singular the said premises with their and every of their appurtenances unto the said Mary Errington, George Kinsey and Joseph King their heirs and assigns to the only proper use and choice of them.....etc.*

In the release document William is referred to as a husbandman, usually described at this time as someone who farmed their own land which was a step up from being a tenant farmer. By 1720, in other documents, he was being described as a Yeoman which was generally a step up from a husbandman, and he was probably described as such because he was a freeholder, owning his own house. When signing for receipt of payment William and Mary made their mark as shown below demonstrating that they could not write their names.



From the "Dictionary of Words, Facts and Phrases by Eliezer Edwards (1882):-

*Signing with an X – Persons who cannot write their names are required to use as a substitute the sign of the cross (x). Anciently, Kings and Nobles used the same sign but not ignorantly, as it was used by those who could not write, as a symbol that the person making it pledged himself by his Christian faith to the truth of the matter to which he affixed it. Hence although people now write or subscribe their names, they are still said to sign.*

John Nichols tells us in "The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicestershire", Volume 3. Pt. 2. that William Dexter in the election of 1722, **polled as a freeholder in Griffy or Griffith's Dam.**

From old lease and release indentures and abstract of title documents it has been proved that the surviving property which now has the address of 31 Top Road, Griffydam was owned by a William Dexter in 1720. This raises the question, as to whether William Dexter owned this cottage in 1701 when the earlier release indenture was executed and he was living in Griffith Dam. The release indenture identifies him as a land owner in Worthington and Breedon and on that basis, he would presumably have been able to afford his own property at that time.

The Wesleyan Methodist Chapel and part of the cemetery were built on land attached to the cottage once owned by William Dexter. At this time of course, most of Griffith Dam would have been open fields with the odd hovel / cottage dotted around.



**31 TOP ROAD - THE CORE OF THIS BUILDING IS THOUGHT TO BE THE OLDEST SURVIVING BUILDING IN GRIFFYDAM**

The cottage in the above photograph taken in the early 1980's was fortunately not demolished and is now an admirably renovated private dwelling house with the address of 31, Top Road, Griffydam. This building is very important historically, and has a very interesting past. When the lower walls of the property were exposed during renovation work it was observed that the lower courses were constructed of

Charnwood granite blocks, probably taken off the fields. It is likely that it would have had a thatched roof initially, before being tiled at some later time.

From old lease and release indentures and abstract of title documents, we can prove that this cottage originally dates back to the occupation and ownership of William Dexter in 1720. The chapel and part of the cemetery are also on land once owned by William Dexter.

In an 1823 Indenture of Lease and Release the cottage is described as follows:-

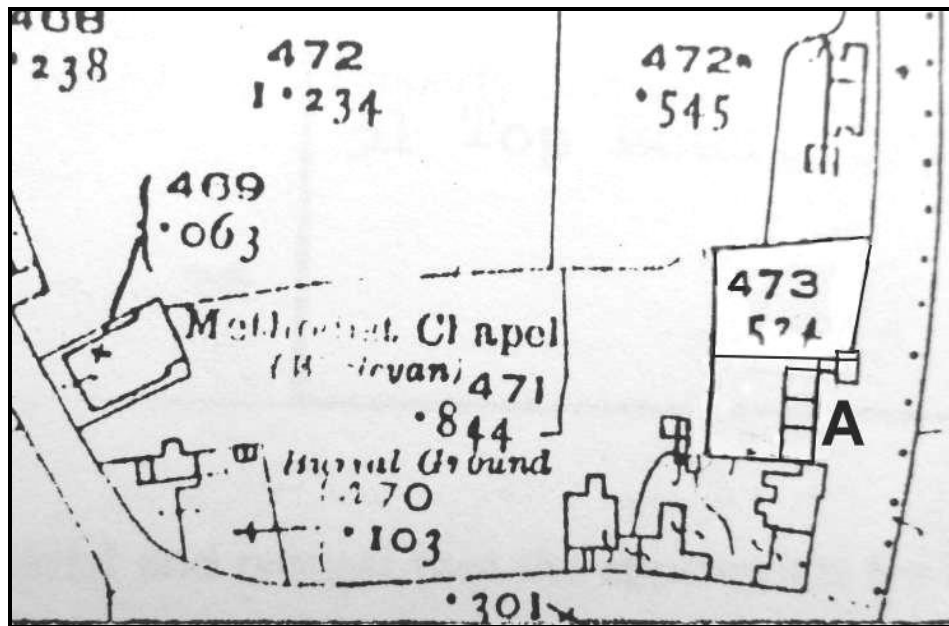
*All that messuage (cottage) or tenement with the out buildings and ground to the same belonging situate and ? Griffy dam aforesaid and which descended to John Bailey from his ancestors, **having been formerly purchased from William Dexter.** (Note – at this point the messuage (cottage) is described as one property).*

In 1836 and 1865 “Abstract of Title Records” it confirms that **the single messuage (cottage) had been converted into three dwellings** and were in the possession of Phoebe Bailey, John Davis and John Hannage (**tenants**) and William Hodgson, Samuel Halls and Benjamin Johnson (**tenants**) respectively.

In 1872 the following is stated - *All these three messuages (cottages) or tenements, formerly one messuage (cottage), with the outbuildings gardens and grounds the same belonging situate and being at Griffydam and then in the respective occupation of William Hodgson, Benjamin Johnson and Samuel Platts (**tenants**) and which said messuages (cottages) and hereditaments are bounded on the East by the Hinckley to Melbourne Turnpike Road, on the West by a croft belonging to the trustees of the Wesleyan Chapel at Griffy-dam aforesaid, on the North by a close and gardens belonging to Edmund Doman, and on the South by a garden and building belonging to Thomas Upton.*

In 1879, the following is stated - *All these three messuages (cottages) or tenements, formerly one messuage (cottage), with the outbuildings gardens and grounds the same belonging situate and being at Griffydam and then in the respective occupation of William Hodgson, Benjamin Johnson and Samuel Platts (**tenants**) and which said messuages and hereditaments are bounded on the East by the Hinckley to Melbourne Turnpike Road, on the West by a croft belonging to the trustees of the Wesleyan Chapel at Griffydam aforesaid, on the North by a close and gardens belonging to...(not given)... and on the South by a garden and buildings belonging to...(not given).....*

In 1881, the following is stated - *All these three messuages (cottages) or tenements, formerly one messuage (cottage), with the outbuildings gardens and grounds the same belonging situate and being at Griffydam and then in the respective occupation of Benjamin Johnson, Samuel Platts and Mr. Nutt (**tenants**) and which said messuages and hereditaments are bounded on the East by the Hinckley to Melbourne Turnpike Road, on the West by a croft belonging to the trustees of the Wesleyan Chapel at Griffydam aforesaid, on the North by a close and gardens belonging to...(not given)... and on the South by a garden and buildings belonging to...(not given).....*



The above 1881/ 1882 surveyed O/S map shows William Dexter's Message / Cottage extended / converted into three. It is designated by the letter A

Presumably the original cottage which was in the ownership of William Dexter was partly extended / converted to make three properties which the preceding photograph suggests was the case.

#### NOTE

William Dexter had a son William born in 1690, so there is a very slight chance that he could have been the owner of 31, Top Road, Griffydham in 1720 but it is unlikely.