

# GRACE

The Graces are descended from Raymond le Gros, or le Gras, one of the three outstanding figures of the Anglo-Norman invasion. He married Strongbow's daughter and was viceroy in 1176. The territory which they acquired in consequence was in what is now Co. Kilkenny and it was called Grace's country. The head of the family was known as Baron of Courtstown (a place to be distinguished from Courtown in Co. Wexford). In 1690 the extent of this property was 32,000 acres: the then owner, Robert Grace, was exempted from confiscation by an article of the Treaty of Limerick, but his son was dispossessed in 1701 on a technical legal point. The Graces, like almost all the great Hiberno-Norman families, remained Catholic and espoused the Jacobite cause. Col. John Grace raised and commanded one of the regiments in James II's army, in which at least ten of the name served as officers. Col. Richard Grace (1620-1691) was one of the most notable personalities of seventeenth century Ireland: he was prominent in both the Cromwellian and the Williamite wars, and in the latter he

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was killed in action at the siege of Athlone at the age of 70. Up to the time of the Courtstown confiscation the Grace connexion was mainly, but by no means entirely, with Co. Kilkenny, in which county, indeed, the name is still quite numerous - in 1659 it was recorded as a principal Irish name in four baronies of County Kilkenny and also in the adjoining Tipperary barony of Eliogarty. A number of places in the four midland counties of Kilkenny, Carlow, Leix and Kildare have taken their names from the Grace family: Castle Grace, Grace Castle, Grace's Wood, Graceland, Grace's Court and Gracefield - the last named, near Athy was formerly called Shanganagh.

The Ormond Deeds, the Justiciary Rolls and every mediaeval record which deals with that part of the country abound in references to the Grace family, who held many public administrative positions and were closely associated with the monastery of Jerpoint, of which two Graces were abbots.

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James Grace (fl. 1538), the annalist, was of Gracefield, the home of a branch of the Courtstown family. Another very notable member of the Gracefield branch was John Grace (1734-1811) who, while serving with the Austrian army, was detailed as the special escort of Marie Antoinette on her journey back to France; on retiring from foreign service he returned to Ireland and was the first Catholic since 1689 on the Grand Jury for Co. Roscommon. The Co. Roscommon estate at Mantua, near Elphin, formerly in the possession of the Dowel family, was acquired by marriage in the eighteenth century. Another worthy mention was Sheffield Grace (c. 1788-1850), the antiquary. The mission of Father John Grace to the West Indies (1667-1669) is described in *Analecta Hibernica*, No. 4.

The Grace baronetcy, held by direct descendants of Raymond le Gros, descended by special remainder in 1818 from Sir Raymond Grace Gamon.