



URSWICK CHURCH

and the

GEORGE WASHINGTON CONNECTION

Unlikely?

Read on.....

St Mary and St Michael's Church is old, one of the oldest in the country. Buildings before the present Mediaeval church stood here for very many years and, God willing, will stand here for many years to come. High on the South wall of the Chancel, above the Priests door is a memorial plaque dedicated to Christopher Wilson, his daughter Sarah, his wife Margaret Bradyll and Sarah's husband, John Gale. These three families have been supporters and benefactors of the Church for generations and indeed the Gales have their own family pew adjacent to the Chancel Arch. Christopher himself is buried under the Chancel floor, in the tomb the entrance to which is marked with a brass plaque.

Christopher was a Sea Captain, who made a great deal of money working for the East India Company. He bought Bardsea Hall (*Barretsiege in Domesday Book*) in 1732 after his marriage to Margaret Bradyll whose father, John, owned Conishead Priory nearby. Their Daughter Sarah, known to the family as 'Sally', married John Gale of Whitehaven in Urswick Church on July the 7th, 1752.

John was a member of a prosperous and well known Whitehaven family whose wealth primarily came from trading with the colonies of Virginia and Maryland in the Americas. Indeed, many of the family lived there, from about 1666 when an earlier John Gale (or *Gayle*) obtained land along the Choptank River at Kingstowne in Maryland.

John had an uncle, George Gale, an elder brother of his own father William. George was often in Virginia and Maryland doing business and on one visit met a young widow, Mildred Warner whose husband, Captain Lawrence Washington, had recently died. In 1700 George proposed and Mildred and he were married in Virginia. She already had three children, John, Augustine and Mildred, and took them with her when she and George travelled to Whitehaven, leaving Virginia on May the 31st 1700 in George's ship, *Cumberland*. She was pregnant when she left America and the baby was born after their arrival in Whitehaven. The child, a little girl, was baptized Mildred, but her mother was very ill with a fever and died shortly after the birth. She was buried in St Nicholas' Church, Whitehaven on January the 30th 1701, soon to be reunited with her baby who died a few weeks afterwards. Mildred left her estate and the custody of her children by Lawrence Washington to George. This was contested by the executors of Washington's estate and although they lost their case, it was reversed on appeal. George had proved a good and kind stepfather, but had to return the children to Virginia. Who can say what would have happened to the history of the World if this had not happened.

Of the three children, Augustine, named after Mildred's father Augustine Warner, was the most significant as he went on to marry Mary Ball in 1731 and their first child, George, who was to become the first President of the United States, was born on February the 22nd 1732. George was therefore a fairly close contemporary and relation of Urswick's John Gale, being the grandson of John's aunt, by marriage and must have known him well.

George Gale went on to re-marry later in 1701. His bride was Elizabeth Denwood, daughter of a prominent Quaker, of Somerset, Maryland. He died in 1712, in Monie Hundred, Somerset, Maryland. Elizabeth lived until 1736 when she died in her 62nd year.

John Gale outlived his wife Sarah by some 40 years, dying in 1814. He inherited or acquired a lot of property by the time he died, all of which is listed on the plaque in Urswick Church.

