

Adolphus Cooke

The Follies Trust has been involved in the conservation of many mausolea, but none so richly deserving of the name ‘folly’ as the mausoleum built by the eccentric Adolphus Cooke.¹ He was born in 1798, the illegitimate son of a Cookesborough landowner Robert Cooke, and an unknown servant. Robert did not disown his son, but he forbade him to enter his house and had him raised in a poor cottage. He was sent to school in England where he joined the British army and saw service in various countries. Robert had two legitimate sons but they died before him and so when he in turn died in 1835, the illegitimate Adolphus inherited the estate. His eccentricities soon appeared. He treated his servants with military harshness, never married and hated children. He chastised one man who had twelve children and rewarded another for having none. He preferred beasts to men, but it would be wrong to think that he was kind to animals. He was attached to a red setter called Gusty, but warned him before witnesses that if he strayed again he would be hanged like a common criminal. Gusty ignored the warning and was only saved through an even greater eccentricity of his master. Adolphus feared death and had bizarrely inconsistent beliefs in reincarnation. He was convinced that a turkey on his farm contained the soul of his father or grandfather, so when the canine criminal was led away for execution, the man charged with the deed asserted that the turkey had intervened to spare the guilty party—and Adolphus believed him. He sometimes thought that he himself would be reincarnated as a fox or a bird. He built himself a marble vault, but when he died (in 1876) the local rector refused to bury him in it and instead he lies with his father and his nurse in the beehive-shaped mausoleum we see today. We can only assume he that believed that one or more of the trio would be reincarnated as a bee.

¹ The most recent historical account of Adolphus Cooke is by Patrick Geoghegan in the Royal Irish Academy’s *Dictionary of Irish Biography, from the earliest times to the year 2002*, Cambridge University Press, 2009, vol. 2, p. 811.