

Ty'r Craig Castle (The House on the Rock)

An article by **Mike Newland**

Originally published in the **Autumn 2002** edition of **Trafalgar Times**

The following article is the result of a conversation with a colleague of mine who had just returned from a caravanning holiday in North Wales. When he began describing the area in which he had been touring I interrupted, casually inquiring as to whether he had seen William Wellington Greener's old house. His reply, to my surprise, was that he didn't even know it was there. "There" being the outskirts of Barmouth. Further discussion revealed that he had quite probably travelled right past it, or at least very close by without even being aware of the fact. I then realised that there may be a good many more people out there who are also unaware of its whereabouts and that it might be an idea to write a short piece on the subject for the Trafalgar Times.

W.W. Greener lived at numerous addresses in and around Birmingham following his arrival in the town from Newcastle in 1844. His final residence was a large house in Grange Lane, Erdington, called "The Cedars". He moved there in 1869 at a time when Erdington was still very much a rural area. Initially he rented the property from the then owner Henry Phillips for the princely sum of forty pounds per annum, less than the price of one of his best guns. Later he bought the property outright and eventually died there on the 20th July, 1921. Despite dying in Birmingham he is buried at Llanaber Parish Church in North Wales.

The reason for this was the fact that between 1891 and 1892 he built a miniature castle called "Ty'r Craig" as a holiday home for himself and his wife Emma. This had initially come about because previously, whilst holidaying in the area some years earlier, the pony trap in which the couple were travelling shed a wheel when nearing the top of the hill on the coast road leading north out of Barmouth towards Llanaber. While William Wellington set about replacing the wheel Emma sat on a rock at the side of the road and admired the scenery. "It would be nice to have a house here, it is such a lovely view" she remarked to W. W. He obviously agreed wholeheartedly, although he probably couldn't see it for himself as he was very nearly blind. Nevertheless not long afterwards he purchased a sizeable plot on that precise spot and so "Ty'r Craig Castle" came into being.

The view from the west windows of "Ty'r Craig" looks out over the magnificence of Cardigan Bay. The name of the house translated from the Welsh simply means the "House on the Rock". An interesting feature of its Gothic design is that when viewed from the air its outline, due to the two round towers, is said to vaguely resemble that of a double barrel shotgun. Whether this was by accident or design one can never be sure, but the stained glass windows leave one in no doubt as to the identity of its owner. Several of the windows were based on illustrations taken from W. W. Greener's famous book "The Gun and its Development". There was one depicting Berhold Schwartz, the legendary German Monk from Friberg, experimenting with gunpowder. Particularly splendid was the reproduction of the Coat of Arms that appeared on the bindings of the Eighth and Ninth Editions of Mr Greener's magnum opus. Sadly the house was sold around 1950 and "Ty'r Craig" is now run as a hotel but thankfully it still retains many of the stained glass windows originally installed by the great man.

On the highest peak overlooking the town of Barmouth is another Greener monument, a War Memorial erected by W. W. in honour of those who gave their lives during the First World War. This was almost certainly brought about by the fact that he had lost his own grandson, Captain Leysters Llewellyn Greener, who was killed in action at La Vaquaria on the 5th December, 1917. Captain L. L. Greener of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment had been severely wounded, losing an eye early on in the conflict. He was awarded the Military Cross for bravery in 1915.

Also buried at the little church in Llanaber are W. W.'s wife Emma and their third son Harry. Along with them lies their grandson Captain Leysters Llewellyn Greener, the second son of Charles Edward Greener.

© Mike Newland