



Memorial at Ross

by Graham Ford

Please feel free to download and print this article. It must not be sold. It must not be distributed without credit being given to the author and also to the Pitcairn and Norfolk Islands Society. Please visit our website at www.pitcairnandnorfolkislandssociety.co.uk

Churches are full of memories and each plaque has a story to tell. Every so often the account is harrowing and full of great misfortune endured many miles from home.

One such instance can be found in the parish church of St Mary's in Ross-on-Wye. A simple inscription on a small brass tablet is in memory of Lt. Walter Green, who, while only 23 years old, died on May 9th 1906. The inscription goes on to mention HMS *Flora*, which was cruising around the Pacific at that time and was scheduled to visit Pitcairn Island a few months later. Why did Lt Green die at such an early age? The first world war was still eight years away and life-threatening illnesses had been mostly eradicated. We are left to speculate!

Walter James Sinclair Green was born on the 19th February 1883 at Sandown, Isle of Wight. His father, Dr William Green had earlier lived at a number of locations but by the early 20th century the family settled down in the market town of Ross, Herefordshire, the next county to where William was born (Droitwich, Glos). A member of the Green family, Arthur, was the medical officer in Ross and Hon. Surgeon to the town's cottage hospital. Built in 1879, this hospital held a warm place

Please feel free to download and print this article. It must not be sold. It must not be distributed without credit being given to the author and also to the Pitcairn and Norfolk Islands Society. Please visit our website at www.pitcairnandnorfolkislandsociety.co.uk

in the hearts of the local population. So it was that William and his wife Emily settled down to a comfortable life-style in Ivy House, Corps Cross Street.

Walter, for his part, had already joined the Royal Navy and was appointed midshipman in October 1899. In a world where very few visited far-off destinations, one can just imagine the anticipation and excitement of having the rare opportunity of taking part in a cruise to the islands of the South Seas, aboard a capital ship of His Majesty's 'senior service'. Tragedy, however, was soon to befall the young lieutenant. Whilst at Acapulco, he was diagnosed as suffering from the wasting disease, Phthisis, and immediately invalided out of active service. His condition provoked such grave anxiety that he was taken from *Flora*, attended by the staff surgeon and two ratings, to be sent to hospital in San Francisco.

The same day as the diagnosis, 18th April 1906, San Francisco experienced a calamitous 7.9 earthquake when the San Andreas fault dislodged itself and the earth moved several metres, causing 3,000 deaths and extraordinary damage.

On the 1st May Lt Green was evacuated out of the blackened rubble and placed on a train for the long overland journey east to New York. Nine days later, somewhere near the USA-Canadian Port Huron border, Lt. W. J. Sinclair Green RN, the younger son of Dr W. R. Green died. His passing was recorded in the 'deaths' column of the *Ross Gazette*, the following Thursday.

Walter's last resting place is at Lake View in Sarnia, Ontario, a long way from Ross, but one of the most prestigious cemeteries in Canada.

Flora continued to sail on through the Pacific and in July finally reached Pitcairn, a destination Walter Green was never to see.

With full agreement of the church authorities, a lasting tribute, the 18" x 10" brass memorial, was thus inscribed:

We which have believed to enter unto rest.

Weblinks:

www.ross-on-wye.com/index.php?page=ross_050-The_Church&pg=1

www.facebook.com/pages/St-Mary-The-Virgin-Church-Ross-on-Wye/212011305462?sk=wall