

GREVILLE, CHARLES FRANCIS (1749-1809), founder of Milford Haven town, Pembrokeshire

Name: Charles Francis Greville

Date of birth: 1749

Date of death: 1809

Partner: Emma Hamilton (née Lyon)

Parent: Elizabeth Greville (née Hamilton)

Parent: Francis Greville

Gender: Male

Occupation: founder of Milford Haven town, Pembrokeshire

Area of activity: Business and Industry; Engineering, Construction, Naval Architecture and Surveying; Royalty and Society

Author: James Frederick Rees

Second son of Francis, earl of Warwick, and his wife Elizabeth Hamilton. He became the agent, and subsequently the heir, of his mother's brother, Sir William Hamilton (1730 - 1803), who had succeeded to a considerable estate in south Pembrokeshire through his marriage with Catherine Barlow of Colby (died 1782). In 1790 Hamilton obtained a private act of parliament which enabled him to develop his property in the manors of Hubberston and Pidl, to build quays, docks, piers, to establish a market, provide roads, etc. Since he was absent from the country as British minister at the court of Naples (1764-1800) he entrusted the carrying out of the scheme to Greville. To this task Greville devoted himself with great energy. He built a custom-house for the convenience of shipping and an inn for the accommodation of passengers to Ireland. He invited several families of American Quakers, who had been engaged in South Sea whaling from Nantucket Island, Massachusetts, to settle at Milford. The first of them arrived in 1793 and for some years they carried on trade in spermaceti oil which had been used as an illuminant in London. He also induced the navy board to commission the building of frigates, the first contracts being signed in April 1797. In the town itself, which was laid out in three streets parallel with one another, he had a church built which was consecrated in 1808 and dedicated to S. Katherine. A Friends' meeting house was opened in 1811 in the enclosure where many members of the American immigrants are buried. Greville also projected a school or college of navigation provided with an observatory, which was never completed. He staged a first-class piece of publicity for his new town by inducing Sir William and lady Hamilton, accompanied by lord Nelson, to visit it in August 1802. The event, coinciding with the anniversary of the battle of the Nile, was celebrated by a cattle-show, sports, regatta, and a banquet at which Nelson made a speech in which he highly praised Greville's achievements. The presence of lady Hamilton (1765 - 1815), née Amy Lyon and more generally known as Emma Hart, naturally attracted much attention. In her youth she had been a protégée of Greville. It was he who introduced her to his friend Romney, whose portrait studies of her are so well known. She subsequently went to Naples and in 1791 became the second wife of Sir William Hamilton.

After the death of Greville in April 1809, the new town entered upon a period of depression. Greville was succeeded by his younger brother ROBERT FULKE GREVILLE (1751 - 1824), sometime equerry to king George III. He took but a tepid interest in his brother's projects. When the Admiralty proposed to purchase the site of the dockyard, for which it had been paying a yearly rent, he refused to accept its valuation. It was therefore decided to transfer the establishment to a site at Paterchurch, higher up the Haven and on the opposite side. This transfer was effected in 1814 and thus was founded Pembroke Dock, which remained a royal dockyard for over a century. The demand for spermaceti oil was struck a fatal blow by the growing use of coal gas as an illuminant.

Robert Fulke Greville was succeeded by his son, also ROBERT FULKE GREVILLE (1800 - 1867). He stood for the county in the general election of 1831 against Sir John Owen of Orielson and was defeated by 109 votes. Both candidates felt the heavy financial strain of the contest. For the next twenty years Greville lived abroad. He served with the rank of major in the British Auxiliary Legion during the Carlist rising in Spain. Later he lived near Paris. In 1853 he returned to his estate and attempted to retrieve the fortunes of Milford. He took up his residence at the 18th century country house, Castle Hall, to which he made extensive additions. The South Wales railway reached Haverfordwest in 1854 and Greville made every effort to have it extended to Milford. When the directors decided to make Neyland the terminus he sought powers to effect a junction with it at Johnston. He also supported a project to construct a railway from Milford to Manchester through Mid Wales to secure for the port a share in the American trade. At his own cost he had a wooden pier, pier-house, and hotel built for the Irish traffic. He also had two bridges with road approaches constructed to facilitate lateral communication across the two inlets or pills between which the town lies. Against much local opposition he succeeded in getting an Improvement Act (1857) for the appointment of commissioners with power to levy a rate and raise capital to provide the town with gas-works, water-works, etc. His many schemes exhausted his resources. His estate was mortgaged far beyond its value and it passed to the most important creditor, the National Provident Institution. Greville died on 12 September 1867 and was buried in St. Katherine's church where his memorial records that 'he sacrificed his fortune in his endeavour to promote and develop the resources of this place.'

Author

Sir James Frederick Rees, (1883 - 1967)

Sources

Richard Fenton, *A Historical Tour through Pembrokeshire* (London 1811)

F. Thomas, *The Builders of Milford* (1920)

Greville-Hamilton Papers in N.L.W.

personal investigations

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