

# *Grand Design*

— IANDRA CASTLE —





***Iandra Castle is not a sight*** you're expecting to see, should you take the road less travelled between Cowra and Young. It's a sensory surprise. Your car slows down, your heart picks up pace, and you crane your neck to gaze in wonder at this stately Edwardian castle standing in the paddock, in a manner that's as proud as it is unexpected. The sentiment of reward would not have been lost on the man behind the mansion – a man who took the road less travelled himself, and carved many of his own along the way.

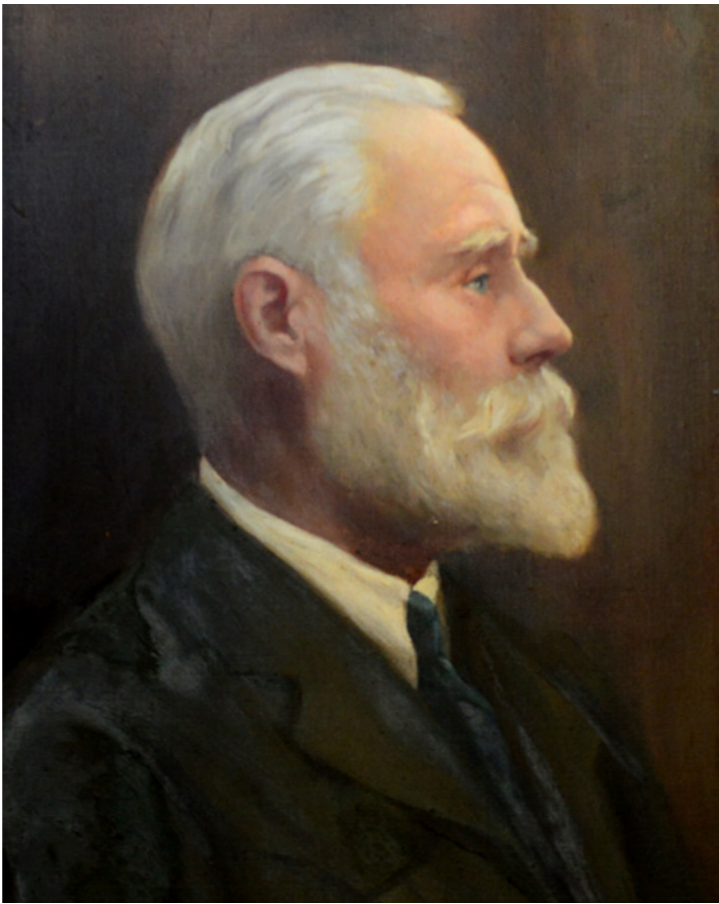
### *The early days*

A pioneer of not only Iandra, but of Australian agriculture as a whole, George Henry Greene (right) was not afraid to push the boundaries of convention. He was a man who saw how things could be done better, and so did them that way – he led by innovation and example.

Irish-born Greene caught a glimpse of early Australia when he arrived with his father, Lieutenant William Pomeroy Greene, who was medically advised to seek out a warmer climate after he was invalided out of the Royal Navy following the taking of Rangoon in the Burmese war in 1824. In 1842 the family converged on Australia, on an expedition across the oceans that included their house packed into sections, their complete library collection, numerous house staff and animals.

They settled at Woodlands, north of Melbourne, where they reassembled the house. George was educated in Melbourne, and in 1858 he was among the first five students to graduate with a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Melbourne. He subsequently took up land in Victoria and southern NSW, and in 1870 married Miss Crawford, the second daughter of Colonel Crawford of the Indian Army. Greene soon sold his land interests, and the couple returned to the UK, where they spent the early years of their marriage.

In 1878 Mr and Mrs Greene returned to Australia, and purchased Iandra, or Mt Oriel as George named it then. He paid 6/6 per acre for the estimated 34,000 acres, which was later surveyed to be 32,000 acres. The sceptical views of his peers were contrary to the vision Greene had for the property, which was thought to be in an unpromising area, and had additional challenges of isolation and logistics – the closest railhead was at Harden, 40 miles away. What Greene embarked on could be considered one of the more ambitious transformations in early Australian agriculture. >





He began an impressive program of land clearing, fencing and building – soon the whole area was ready to be farmed, with the exception of shade trees, shelter belts and woodlots. When Greene died in 1911, his obituary in the *Sydney Morning Herald* stated that “he found Iandra a forest, he left it a granary”.

Following the farming of wheat on Iandra throughout the 1880s, in 1893 Greene introduced the concept of share-farming – an initiative that simply made good sense to him at the time, yet it was a first for the country and an idea that set the standard for how this procedure is still practised today. Greene had the intent to create a culture that would recognise the worth of men and women working together for mutual benefit, to develop a strong nation. This was evident in the initial arrangements of shared inputs and shared rewards, with the addition of incentives for increased yield.

The team of people he gathered to work with him on Iandra shared the same vision and reaped much reward from the concept, with many building the equity to purchase their own piece of Iandra. Greene played a major role in accomplishing two great things during this time to assist in the prosperity of Iandra – the development of a new railway link between Koorawatha and Grenfell to provide more efficiency and opportunity in the transit of produce and goods, and the development of the nearby village of Greenethorpe.

Iandra was the first property to commercially grow William Farrer’s “Federation” wheat, which reaped considerably higher yields than the alternatives, and enjoyed popularity that was arguably the longest of any strain of wheat. Greene also experimented successfully with the use of superphosphate, was the first to demonstrate the reaper binder and, in 1910, the Massey Harris reaper thresher, now known as the header. At one time, the property carried more than 19,000 sheep and in one year produced more than 10,000 tonnes of wheat.

In those times, Iandra was a hive of activity. It boasted its own store, post office, public school, carpenter and blacksmith shops, as well as a handling agent for much of the farm machinery. In addition to 27 permanent homestead staff and 61 share-farmers, the property employed 350 men, with additional help during harvest times to increase the workforce to between 500 and 600 men. The granite St Saviour’s church was built in 1886 by Greene, who is now buried nearby. >

**FACING PAGE:** The rear view of the castle cuts an imposing figure; electricity was generated in Iandra’s own power station in the stables building.  
**RIGHT:** The 57-room castle is an impressive two-storey structure made of steel-reinforced concrete, and features facilities that were ahead of its time.





### *The homestead*

In 1880, Greene commenced the construction of the single-storey Mt Oriel homestead from red bricks fired on the property. In 1908, he began the transformation of this building into the grand castle that stands in its place today. The existing foundations were used, and the house was incorporated into a two-storey structure made of steel-reinforced concrete – a method, that while not common, presented great merit to Greene.

Being the forward-thinker he was, Greene implemented a number of impressive features in the 57-room building that were innovative for the time. Electricity was generated in Iandra's own power station in the stables building, and was run through the walls of the house via cotton-covered electric wires housed by steel conduit. This power was produced by a gas-producing plant (using timber from the property), which in turn powered a generator to keep batteries charged for the supply of 110 volts of direct current, which supplied not only the main house, but the stables and cottages as well.

The homestead features also included a 20-point telephone switchboard, hot and cold running water, a septic system, and a state-of-the-art water supply.

Greene constructed an 18,000-gallon (82,000-litre) reinforced concrete water filter in a large dam on Iandra, and filtered water was pumped by windmill to a 28,000-gallon (127,000-litre) water tower above a grain silo, before it was reticulated to the homestead, stables and cottages. Overflow of the household water supply ran to the settling dam of the septic system, and this water was used on the orchard and vegetable garden.



At the homestead, the water was pumped from ground level to a galvanised tank in the roof area by an electric motor that drove a double-acting piston pump. Nearby was an additional tank – 18,000 gallons (82,000 litres) of underground storage that was filled from the house and stable roofs.

Some elements of the homestead have been adapted over time, such as the original electrical wiring and power points, however the earthenware pipes originally laid for the septic installation are still in use today.

Following Greene's death in 1911, Iandra was managed by South Australian Leonard I'Anson, who arrived on the station in 1906. Mrs Greene, son William and three daughters returned to England during WWI, where William subsequently became a politician. I'Anson continued to manage the property until 1924, when it was sold to him. >





### Changing times

Iandra was purchased by the Methodist Church in 1954, and used as a training farm and home for delinquent boys – first offenders aged in their teens and early 20s. The boys worked on the farm where they had a dairy, pigs and chooks, and sold their produce to the local community. The home was closed in 1974 and sold with the remaining 3000 acres in 1975.

The new owners, David and Margaret Morris, found the castle in need of attention and care, and set about restoring the establishment to its former glory. As a structural engineer, David had a fitting background and the required knowledge to make their plans a reality.

David engaged the assistance of a talented carpenter, Neville Fragar, and they worked together to carefully restore the castle, internally and externally, over the next 15 years.

The castle was heritage listed in 2004, following David's passing in 2002. Since that time, Iandra has been in the care of his wife, Margaret, who resides at her Rylstone property, and at age 88 still drives herself to visit Iandra. The property and castle are diligently looked after by devoted managers Rod and Bev Kershaw, who live in the historic manager's home.

Iandra Castle holds around six open days per year, each attracting up to 1000 visitors, and private visits can be arranged (for groups of more than 30 people). These open days provide a special opportunity for the public to explore such a unique treasure, and funds raised help contribute to the extensive upkeep involved in caring for such an important piece of our history. **CWL**



*UPDATE: Margaret passed away in 2014, aged 88, leaving Rod and Bev Kershaw with the management task of keeping Mt Oriel's doors open to the inquisitive public. The iconic building, along with the surrounding stables, church and residences, was placed on the NSW Heritage list in 2005.*

*Words: Kate Boshammer Images: Angus Waddell, Zenio Lapka, Shot by Jake Edition G, Spring 2014*

**ABOVE:** The historic manager's home on Iandra; dedicated managers Rod and Bev Kershaw; David Morris worked for many years on the careful restoration of the castle, after purchasing it with his wife Margaret in 1975.

