

BUILDINGS AT RISK

Heritage: Second in a series of articles following decision by groups to join forces in bid to protect properties

Goods shed's importance

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The large stone goods shed at Port St Mary railway station may appear humble but it represents an important part of the island's heritage.

When the southern line of the Isle of Man Railway was built in 1874, the fishing village of Port St Mary was almost overlooked. An outcry resulted in a station being built – albeit initially just a wooden shelter.

The first goods shed for Port St Mary was also built of wood in 1880, providing a point at which commodities of all kinds could be brought in by rail and transferred to carts for delivery to where they were needed. Also local produce from the surrounding farms and fishing quay could be shipped out far more rapidly than by horsedrawn road transport.

The improved transport the railway provided helped transform Port St Mary into a popular holiday resort. Hotels were built above Chapel Bay, together with a parade of new shops close by. In 1898, the same year that the public hall was built, local builders constructed the imposing red-brick station building – originally with refreshment room – that we see today, along with a proper raised platform.

The building of a new goods shed followed in 1902, built in grey stone with red-brick quoins, and a pitched slate roof which was originally fitted with a skylight. Double doors in both the east and west ends allowing a siding to run right through the building alongside a loading platform, enabling goods to be easily transhipped from railway wagons to road carts using access doors on the south, east and west sides. Old photographs show that there were originally projecting canopies too.

A second siding allowed coal to be brought by rail to fuel the adjacent gasworks. There was also a cattle dock allowing livestock to be transported – something not provided at Port Erin. It would have been vital to local farmers for getting their animals to the island's shows, fairs and markets.

Surviving ledgers from 1913 show the wide range of items being sent by rail from



The goods shed today, and below right, pictured in historical images from the Ballahane collection

Douglas. Paethorpes' sausages from Staffordshire, Players' tobacco, and cocoa from other English suppliers, plus books from the British and Foreign Bible Company, all made their way by train to the village. Luxury items for wealthy households were sent down from Harrods of London, and less pricey ones for middle class households came from department stores in Manchester. Dunlop bicycle tyres and crop seeds for farms were among the many other items arriving via the goods shed.

From the 1920s, however, road improvements and development of motor transport saw the railway facing greater competition and by the 1930s it was running its own small lorries to speed up delivery and collection of items brought to the goods shed. Traffic on the Isle of Man Railway was heavy during the Second World War, but the cost was an increasingly worn-out railway in the 1950s and 60. The false dawn of the Marquess of Ailsa's rescue of the railway in 1967 saw a small rail-road container service being introduced to boost goods

traffic, but ultimately it did not succeed.

In 1978 the struggling steam railway was taken over by the government and economies saw the sidings serving Port St Mary goods shed being taken up in 1979. Two years later the station, including the goods shed, was leased to the company Campamarina Ltd for its Trailblazers adventure holidays. Canoes and dinghies were stored all over the site, the station building became a hostel, and the goods shed was turned into a youth club and disco with a mezzanine floor. Railway station staff were relegated to a garden shed-like structure on the platform.

By the mid-80s Campamarina stopped using the station, but their equipment remained around the site for some years.

Nevertheless, the imposing station and goods shed clearly appealed to film companies as they were used in scenes of the 1988 colonial adventure *Ginger Tree*, the 1998 Irish wartime romantic comedy *The Brylcreem Boys* and a 2001 Channel 4 production of *Cinderella*. In 2000 the

interior of the goods shed was also used for filming *Thomas and the Magic Railroad*.

However, after that there was at last a turn up for the books. The 2002 relaying of the Steam Railway for the IRIS sewage pipe scheme saw the ground floor of the station returned to railway use and siding to the goods shed reinstated. In 2007-08 money was invested in rebuilding both of the goods shed's gable ends and on reroofing it, helping it to become a handy building for storage of railway equipment while also restoring its character as a heritage building. Powerpoints and lighting added to its usefulness. However, in the meantime various plans for the nearby station building have fallen by the wayside – including an English developer's proposal to turn it into holiday accommodation while restoring the area at platform level to its original Victorian railway character. A proposal to turn the building into offices also fell through due to parking concerns.

The Isle of Man Steam Railway Supporters Association (IOMSRSA) has become

increasingly concerned that the goods shed – as one of only three left on the surviving Douglas to Port Erin line, the others being at Castletown and Port Erin, with the latter having already been radically altered by incorporation into the railway museum – should be made a registered building to maintain its historic appearance.

They are concerned at government proposals to sell the building off to developers of the now demolished gasworks site. The survival of the Isle of Man's unique Victorian and Edwardian locomotives and carriages is remarkable, but surely the associated buildings which helped make the island what it is today are worthy of being preserved too? Should work done just a decade ago had helped restore Port St Mary goods shed to its original character now be sacrificed, and those efforts steamrollered, in the interests of selling off assets to boost government coffers?

In his report presenting the case for registering Port St Mary goods shed, Dave Booth, of the IOMSRSA, writes: 'The

Department of Infrastructure is intent on selling off this piece of our railway heritage for development and severing forever its connection to the railway.... Previous railway managers always expressed an interest in retaining the goods shed as a useful rail-connected storage asset. However, today's managers, who are merely the current caretakers of our heritage, appear to have no interest.

It is the opinion of the IOMSRSA that the building should be retained by the railway in government ownership... When the sale goes ahead and development occurs, beside the obvious lifting of the rail access, change around the site would be considerable and would totally alter the look of this historic building.

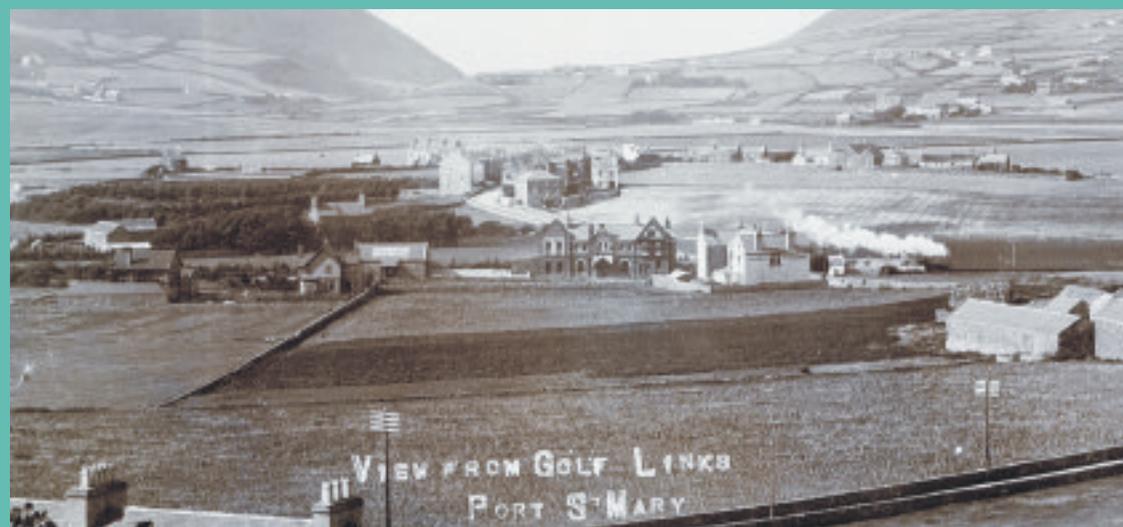
He adds: 'The IOMSRSA has lodged a registered building proposal with the planning department in order to gain some protection for this structure. However, since its submission back in February 2015 the registration process seems to have stalled. Since 2012 the Supporters' Association has lodged proposals for 11 buildings to be added to the registered buildings list. However, so far the planning department has registered only three.'

As an example of what can be achieved with such a building, Dave Booth points to the restored goods shed at Ballaugh. It was built by the Manx Northern Railway in 1879 and has recently been lovingly restored to its former glory by the Ballaugh Heritage Trust. The stonework has been repointed, the doors and windows have been repaired and even the correct form of period guttering has been obtained.

Inside an exhibition space with photographs and maps shows what the old steam railway to Ramsey was like when it was running – final closure came in 1968. Future plans include reinstating some sections of track outside the goods shed and making it an educational resource for school pupils around the area to learn about their heritage.

Surely Port St Mary's goods shed merits having some community pride taken in it too, as a link to the past and as a fitting backdrop to the one remaining line on which the island's unique and historic narrow gauge steam trains still operate?

to our railway heritage



Opinion: A discredited Registration system?

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When the article on the facing page on Port St Mary Railway station and Goods Shed was written, there was still some hope for conservation of Manx buildings.

However, a planning application recently appeared for the redevelopment of both of these buildings.

The plight of these buildings is further proof that the people of this island need to take action to hold government to account and bring the Building Registration process back on track.

In February 2015, registered building proposals were submitted to the Planning and Building Control Directorate for these buildings, which were part-processed and then mysteriously frozen. This gave rise to the fear that the undisclosed reasons for which the properly-logged Registration applications (nos. 281 & 282) were being stalled were, in fact, to facilitate sale by the Manx government.

Building registration was already being neglected island-wide, but it now appears the worst fears were justified, giving at least the perception government is manipulating the registered building process to its own aims.

It is claimed that planning alone is sufficient to protect deserving buildings – but this is not so.

Irrespective of the quality of the application or the good intentions of the applicant there is a very serious issue here.

While on the surface a 'good' planning application might be OK for now, it carries no guarantees for the

future, nor does it afford the same degree of protection to a building's context. Even if a 'good plan' is approved now, if there is a mishap during conversion, or in 5-10 years time, without registration there is no mechanism to enforce on-going protection.

There has long been a view – outside of government – that there needs to be a complete, visible and verifiable separation of registration and planning – whether to avoid actual interference or the scope for suspicion of such interference. This case now is further proof that this separation should happen – as even if there has been no 'manipulation', the publicly-visible evidence seems to appear very much to the contrary.

Registration now needs to be divorced from, and assessed outside of, executive government – whether it is by a totally independent committee, or a body sufficiently upright and robust to act independently. One option would be to treat the registration of buildings in the same way as ancient monuments.

It is fully recognised that there needs to be a sustainable use – and in the case of Port St Mary station, this may mean some remain in railway use and others do not. However, any application needs to be judged after the registration process has been lawfully completed.

Given that there are registration applications for these Port St Mary buildings which are fully acknowledged as in-process by government, in the interests of natural justice this planning application should be placed on hold until the registration has been independently determined.

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