

## BUILDINGS AT RISK

Architecture:

# Moderne: style of choice for the adventurous in the 1930s

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**M**ost people can recognise Victorian and Edwardian architecture, although Georgian architecture, on the Isle of Man, is a little more difficult as we were still building in Georgian style a good 10 years into Victoria's reign.

Some people think Baillie Scott's style is Art Nouveau when it is Arts and Crafts, and there is a generalisation that all 1930s architecture is Art Deco, which is not the case.

On the island there are a handful of 1930s buildings erected for adventurous clients which fall into the little heard of architectural class known as 'Moderne'.

This is a late type of Art Deco that emerged in the 1930s and the principal difference was it lacked the architectural ornament to be found on Art Deco buildings, which was particularly evident around doorways and at the top of skyscrapers.

Moderne architecture emphasised curved forms, long horizontal lines and sometimes introduced nautical elements such as portholes.

It brought with it corner windows where from the outside there didn't appear to be any support to the corner of the building whereas there was a steel pole on the inside hidden by the window frame.

Smooth finished and painted external walls were a prerequisite of the style, and some properties had walls or part walls of Pilkington glass blocks.

Flat roofs were also a necessary element of the design, along with parapet walls and sunbathing areas.

The Moderne style moved into the design of other items such as clocks, radios, furniture and even cars. Windows were manufactured by the Crittal Company and were made of galvanised steel. They were entirely of the casement type compared to the Victorian and Edwardian sliding sash type.

They were also long landscape style to let in as much light as possible. The Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition



A post-war Moderne building from the drawing board of Wilfred Quayle, the nurses' home, built at a cost of £170,000 in 1950-52 by R. Costain and Sons of Liverpool. In need of renovation, it lends itself for many alternative uses. Demolition is not an option

of 1934 had complete houses built in the exhibition hall which they advertised as the 'Village of Tomorrow'. Containing many of the features listed above, the nickname evolved of 'Sun-trap houses'.

The Daily Mail produced an annual book entitled 'The Daily Mail Book of House Plans', and this continued for over 30 years. The pages showed a perspective drawing of a finished dwelling along with a plan and elevations drawn to a small scale.

They were designed by different architects and you could buy a proper set of working plans through the newspaper.

One local resident to buy such a set of plans was John H. Begg who ran Windsor House guesthouse in Port Erin. He bought a plot of land at Glen

Vine and had his Moderne house erected by Creer Brothers of Douglas in 1933-4.

It was a five-bedroomed house with a built-in wardrobe in each room, there was a dining room and a sitting room, an integral garage, a tiled bathroom with a terrazzo floor, good kitchen facilities, two verandahs, sun traps, a flat roof for sunbathing and its own supply of electricity as well as a tennis court.

It cost over £2,000 to build and was described by local architect A. J. Davidson as 'The most modern house in the Isle of Man'.

It was called 'Redlines', but later the name was changed to 'Fairwinds'. It was both the first and best Moderne house in the island. It was demolished in the early 1990s and replaced by a small housing

estate.

When the Quarter Bridge was widened, it necessitated the demolition of a house and cafe run by Mr. J. Cowin. The highway authority agreed to replace the buildings on a site across the road. Mr Cowin engaged A. J. Davidson to produce the plans, but the design came from his assistant C. J. Kneen. He produced the best known Moderne dwelling on the island, 'The Nook', which was built in 1937 and shows on many TT pictures.

In that year, C. J. Kneen also designed, via his employer, a dwelling for Mr. F. S. James on the paddock of Ballabroolie House, just a stone's throw from The Nook, but it is hidden in the trees. In this, curved walls and corner windows were in abundance and there was a circular hall with day-

light coming down through an apparent circular tower. Parapet walls on the flat roof had built-in flowerbeds.

The house is still in existence and like The Nook is a registered building.

**L**omas and Barrett designed some Moderne houses on King Edward Road in Onchan, but they have had alterations over the years. At the entrance to Groudle Glen they designed Glenholme, a combined shop, cafe and dwelling to replace the former cafe that came from the Iron Pier in Douglas.

This had a sun terrace at first floor level that was used as part of the cafe. On the centre section, to overcome the expense of glass blocks, a tim-

ber window frame was made, divided into six inch square panes to give the same effect.

Even Douglas Corporation moved into Moderne architecture with the design of public toilets alongside the TT Grandstand. This contributes to the architectural heritage of the island, but is much under-appreciated. Just prior to the Second World War, Lomas and Barrett designed a Moderne hotel with public bars on Douglas Promenade.

This was the first major work designed by newly-qualified J. P. Lomas. Unfortunately, the outbreak of war saw the building work coming to an end, with three more floors of bedrooms never to be built.

It was the Crescent Hotel which showed great similarities to the hotels in Miami, but the walls were finished in tile



Once described as the most modern house on the Isle of Man and photographed just prior to its demolition in the early 1990s, Redlines was the home of John Begg and his family and cost over £2,000 to build in 1933-4.



The Nook, house and café built for Mr J Cowin as a replacement for an old cottage and shop cum café where the Quarter Bridge Hotel car park now stands.

The first set of plans drawn by Claude Kneen had the shop on the left but then revised plans had it mirror imaged.



One of the Moderne houses designed by Norman Barrett on King Edward Road, Onchan. Some have had pitched roofs added along with other alterations that have lost the original simplistic design of the architect.



Designed by Leslie Hamilton Kearne A.R.I.B.A. the senior architectural assistant in the Borough Surveyor and Engineer's Department, this block stands close to the TT Grandstand. Note the period style writing on the upstand.



Ravenscourt on Peel Road, close to the Nook but hidden by trees. Note the window without a corner on the left and the sun terraces at first floor level. The house was designed for Mr. F.S. James and again the plans were drawn by the young Claude Kneen.



The front entrance to Ravenscourt. Note the curved glass in the windows and the central tower that lets light down into the circular hall below.

rather than render.

During the war, building work was suspended, save for military buildings. When the island's architects returned to the island they designed in the styles they were using before the war until new styles and materials came into being.

A. J. Davidson designed the new Clothworkers' School at Peel with certain overtones of Moderne – flat roof, long lines, lots of metal window frames and porthole windows.

It was W. T. Quayle, however, who designed the largest Moderne building in the island in 1950.

It took two years to build, contained 138 bedrooms, had 300 windows and was the largest building to be erected on the island since the pre-war Ballakermeen School of A. J. Davidson. It was the nurses'

home, which provided accommodation for 95 nurses and 42 sisters. It was built at a cost of £170,000 by R. Costain and Sons of Liverpool, a firm started in Victorian times by Richard Costain of Colby.

Built with a steel frame and finished with facing brick in Flemish bond, it had Crittal windows, it was, and still is, an iconic building.

It should be registered and it is quite capable of adaptation for open plan offices to accommodate many departments of government.

If it were in any of the major cities it would be purchased by developers and fitted out as superior apartments, with a unique selling point of being in a 'Moderne Building'.

It is far too special and too important to demolish, it just needs a new lease of life.



The first commission for Jimmy Lomas, the construction of the Crescent Hotel in Douglas was brought to an abrupt end at the outbreak of the Second World War and so the three extra floors of bedroom accommodation were never built and what was intended as a new hotel on Douglas Promenade became a pub. What would have been the dining room became 'The Spanish Lounge'. The tiled façade was changed some years ago with a rendered finish to look like tiles but the colour has faded and that Daily Express building appearance has been lost for the moment. The building was sold recently and its future is uncertain. Registration should be considered.

# Architects of Moderne architecture

## Norman Midgley Barrett

Born 1888. Articled and then assistant to W. H. Atkinson in Colne, Lancashire, 1905-1910. Set up his own practice at Barnoldswick, Yorkshire, 1910, then war service 1915-19. In 1919, he joined W. H. Lomas and took over Mr Atkinson's practice, trading as Lomas and Barrett in Colne and from 1920 in Douglas also.

Following the death of his partner in 1932, he continued the practice on his own (with assistants) until the Second World War. He was a registered architect and was elected as a licentiate of the Royal Institute of British Architects on 5 March 1934.

## Alexander John Davidson

Born 1902 and educated at Tynwald Street School in Douglas. From 1919 to 1924 he served articles with his maternal uncle W. M. Kerruish FSI. He qualified as an associate of the Surveyors Institution then attended the School of Architecture at Liverpool University for five years.

He became ARIBA in 1928 and set up practice in Douglas. During this time he spent six months in the office of Julius Gregory in New York.

He was elected a member of the Town Planning Institute in 1939. He became a Fellow of the RIBA in 1941 before joining the Royal Engineers, ending up as a Major.

Returning to the island after the war, he took his chief assistant, E. W. Marsh, into partnership in February 1946. Marsh went to Perth, Australia, in October 1953 to set up his own practice.

**Claude Jennings Kneen (Bill)** Born 1915, educated at Douglas High School for Boys then articled to A. J. Davidson, Chartered Architect in Athol Street, Douglas.

Passed final examination of the Chartered Surveyors Institute in 1938. During the Second World War, he served as a Captain in the Royal Engineers in the Middle East. In June 1946, he took up an appointment as assistant architect at Barking Borough Council.

He was elected a licentiate of the Royal Institute of British Architects and returned to the Island in September 1947 to join the practice of Davidson and Marsh as a partner.

He was the architect of A. J. Davidson.

All Saints Church, Douglas, which closed recently.

## James Philipps Lomas (Jimmy)

Born at Barnoldswick, Yorkshire, in July 1914. He came to the island with his parents in 1920 and was educated at Ellesmere School and King William's College. He spent a year in the office of Lomas and Barrett before attending the School of Architecture at Liverpool University 1931-36. He became an ARIBA in January 1937 and worked in the Douglas office of Lomas and Barrett as senior assistant until 1940 when he joined the Royal Navy as an AB and was discharged after the war as a Lieutenant Commander.

Returning to the island, he practiced as J. Philipps Lomas and became FRIBA in 1954.

## William Harold Lomas (Harry)

Born in Burnley in 1881. His great-grandfather was the first mayor of Burnley. He served his articles with W. H. Atkinson, architect, surveyor and estate agent of Colne. In 1919, he entered into partnership with N. M. Barrett and took over Atkinson's practice.

They acted for the Lancashire and Yorkshire Bank in the alteration of a premises in Douglas and W. H. Lomas took up residence here, also working on the Masonic Temple, Royalty Cinema, Crescent Cinema and several hotels. He died aged 51 in 1932.

**Wilfrid Taggart** Quayle Born in Douglas in 1902, he was educated at King William's College which he left in 1919. He became articled to Jos. E. Teare, local architect and surveyor. He qualified as a Fellow of the Surveyors Institute in 1925 and became assistant to Mr Teare.

From 1931 to 1936 he was assistant architect at Nottingham Corporation. He returned to the island and set up in private practice at 29 Athol Street. From 1941-44, he was in the RAF Volunteer Reserves, mentioned in dispatches and invalided out of the service with the rank of A/ Flight Lieut.. He became FIAA in 1940 and his FSI became FRICS in 1945.

He was appointed diocesan surveyor in 1959. He died in April 1982.

He was the brother-in-law of A. J. Davidson.