

## BUILDINGS AT RISK

# Frank looks at the extent of original Castle Mona estate

*Frank Cowin, a Blue Badge Guide co-ordinator and former president of the Isle of Man Natural History and Antiquarian Society, was brought up in that area of Douglas in Clarence Terrace. Here he revisits those haunts of his younger days to see what has changed in the years since, and whether it is for better or worse.*

Castle Mona Avenue and its immediate neighbours are only a small part of the original Castle Mona Estate, but that part behind the actual seafront is little known or seen.

Approaching Castle Mona Avenue via 'Cat Alley', the alley and the linking lane were comparatively free of rubbish. Indeed the only things out of place were builders' materials being used for work on one of the larger properties at the top end of the Avenue – this too must be a good sign.

In the Avenue itself, many of the properties were looking neat and freshly painted, and some even complete with colourful window boxes and hanging baskets.

Other buildings unfortunately were showing signs of their age and in some cases also of neglect and/or inappropriate change.

The Avenue follows the line of the original drive to the Castle Mona except at the Broadway end where it has been realigned at least twice.

Once to accommodate the Central Hotel (now apartments); and again when the shops facing the sea at the bottom of Broadway were demolished and the roadway widened along the first part of the Central Promenade.

This reduced the length of the still-long gardens to Clarence Terrace, whilst the Avenue entrance was altered to be direct from the Promenade instead of from Broadway.

The original Drive ran in the middle of a grass area of which the sea frontage was developed with three terraces – Clarence, The Esplanade and Derby Terrace (with its undivided front lawn) and Derby Terrace. The Avenue was always referred to as The Back Lawn by the 'locals'.

Clarence Terrace and The Esplanade survive much as originally built except for the end house in Clarence Terrace, and the loss of many of the iron balconies.



Alterations to roofs and rear outlets of Castle Mona Avenue and the reopened view



Clarence Terrace, The Esplanade and Derby Terrace post-war

and rebuilt to altered heights and layouts.

After the development of the Terraces, the realigned Drive joined the Promenade at what is now the entrance to Empress Drive, and is marked by the 'scoop' in the garden wall on the South side.

Along part of the Lane behind Clarence Terrace there used to be a row of what were

presumably built as small stables and coach houses – by the 1940s these had become small lock-up workshops.

Adjoining these was the premises of A&E Clague which had at one time been Livery Stables but which changed with the times and became the base for a coach company with its charabancs.

More recently, the work-

shops were demolished and, along with part of the garage site, have been replaced with small 'mews type' dwellings.

All the buildings along the Lane are at the same level as the Promenade but there is then a complete storey rise to Castle Mona Avenue.

This means that at the Northern end of the lane (behind the start of Derby



The corner of Empress Drive with the swept wall of the repositioned Drive entrance

Terrace) adjoining where Stowell's fish and chip shop was situated, there were two shops (now a restaurant) with a former chapel above them.

This was a Methodist Chapel, now hardly remembered, built in 1897 as a summer only mission from Victoria Street Wesleyan Methodist Chapel.

The Mission chapel had its entrance on Castle Mona

Avenue and there is a pathway with steps alongside it to allow easy access for visitors from the boarding houses on the Promenade.

This pathway was at one time gated at each end and the gates locked for a few days each year to prevent it from becoming a public right of way.

Since the chapel ceased to



The end of Castle Mona Avenue with its entrance onto Broadway, prior to the demolition of the shops



The former Esplanade Methodist Chapel



The now abandoned steps to Love Lane



Details of the decay to the long-running eyesore of the Imperial Hotel



A change to the ground floor windows of one property in a terrace



Former stables at the end of the lane from Castle Mona Avenue to Cat Alley



Danger sign and roof repairs



A staircase to heaven or hell?



The sweep of the Avenue along the line of the old Drive. Every gap between the old buildings has been filled in

twelve different types.

This detailing gives character and unites the individual terraces here.

Comparing these details with those used in other places around the town will give some idea who was responsible for what and when. This detailing is vulnerable though, and unsympathetic changes to just one property can spoil a whole terrace's appearance.

All the terraces on the inland side of the Avenue are cut into the foot of the old raised beach cliff line which rises steeply up to Love Lane and Woodville Terrace.

There is a very narrow alleyway behind these terraces with narrow openings out to Castle Mona Avenue thus giving access to a back yard gate for most properties.

The rear outlets of the houses however are built over the rear alleyway so in many cases there is a rear door at first floor level onto the steep bank.

Some few houses tried to garden the steep slope and many used part of it to dry the washing; and a very few householders constructed steps up the bank to give access to Love Lane and so to Broadway in one direction and to Woodville Terrace and the top of the Arches in the other.

Now most of the slope is overgrown with trees and shrubs, most of the top fence has collapsed and Love Lane has disintegrated causing it to have been closed.

Some of the trees have been cut to reopen the view from Woodville Terrace but could result in other problems. One property has had an aluminium 'staircase' constructed up the slope and across Love Lane giving access to Woodville.

Near the Broadway end of Castle Mona Avenue there were two small cabins, both now gone; and on the other side a single boarding house but this was demolished due to subsidence and has now been replaced by a rather brutal block of flats with parking beneath.

On one side of these steps were two small cabins, both now gone; and on the other side a single boarding house but this was demolished due to subsidence and has now been replaced by a rather brutal block of flats with parking beneath.

Parking is a problem with very few spaces useable along the length of the Avenue. Emergency vehicles have been known to have problems in past years but the ban on parking on the seaward side has meant access is easier but parking capacity reduced.

What will the future hold for the Castle Mona Estate and similar areas?

be used for worship it has gone through many and varied uses including a temporary parcels sorting office for the Post Office, a Rock factory, and office/workshop for a number of different firms.

The rear of the Empress Hotel facing onto Castle Mona Avenue has none of the style of its front elevation, and the same can be said of the rear

of the Crescent Apartments. The retention of the façade of the Crescent Cinema was good and a brave attempt was made to extend across the site in the way intended in the original plans when the cinema was built and supposed to be matched with a theatre at the other end with an amusement resort between.

The construction of the

apartments meant the loss of the highly visible Crescent Pavilion and the little seen 'Smokey Joes' Billiard Hall much frequented by off duty troops during the 1939-1945 war.

These were two very interesting temporary buildings which lasted well beyond their 'use by' dates!

The properties along Cas-

tle Mona Avenue were built as a number of terraces mostly of similar but not identical designs.

They are now all just numbers in Castle Mona Avenue and have lost their distinctive terrace names.

Some of the terraces still show their original names which can give a clue as to the date of construction – es-

pecially so with Gordon Terrace which commemorates General Gordon who in 1885 was killed at Khartoum in the Egyptian Sudan.

The terraces all show variations in the door and window shapes and the mouldings around them.

The sprocket pieces under the eaves overhang also differ – there are in fact more than