

## BUILDINGS AT RISK

# Reused, recycled, lost: changing fortunes of a village's heritage

*In this article, Cathy Clucas, a native of Purt Le Moirrey (Port St Mary), looks at how the historic port and community has retained much of its character, and reflects on the modern plight of the port's building heritage*

**E**vidence abounds that people have lived in the vicinity of Port St Mary since after the last Ice Age around 10,000 years ago. The area was ideal for early inhabitants of the island – having the sea, fresh water sources, two types of geology Carboniferous Limestone and Manx Slate, different soils and therefore a good diversity of plants and animals to eat, all within close proximity.

Potentially people could have continually lived in and around this port since prehistoric times. Some of the earliest homes were within caves along the coastline and possibly there were structures made of timber and earth.

Whilst we only have standing stones, shell middens, animal bones, flint tools and burial evidence as reminders of some of the early inhabitants, the more substantial buildings and streetscape tell of the community's history in more recent centuries.

The lower part of Port St Mary lies within the old Manx land division of Fyshgarth (known as a Treen) in the Quarterland of Port St Mary. Many of the buildings surrounding the lower part of the port were built within the extensive Port St Mary Farm – some of the ex-fields are now the present day Port St Mary Golf Course and Seafield, St. Mary's, Linden and Endfield avenues. The Old Farm House is now a private dwelling and many of the outbuildings have been converted into houses.

Pigot's 1837 directory describes Port St Mary thus: 'The village consists of about 80 houses, principally erected close to the harbour'.

They they would usually be built from nearby quarried slate and limestone. Many of the buildings described in the 19th-century directories – then a mix of houses, taverns, inns, hotels, shops, workshops and other businesses – are still there today. There are many examples of past industrial buildings that have been sympathetically converted into private houses or apartments that retain their character and maintain the heritage of the port into the future, such as the pictured Harbour Apartments.

There are also plenty of examples of other older buildings being added to, reused within a newer building, or



Old Port St Mary Farmhouse as it is today, the road at the bottom of the picture was cut through in the 1880s – 1890s as part of the Port St Mary Estate Company scheme (Author)



Port St Mary Farm cart-width gateposts around the corner from farmhouse (Private Collection)



Layout of farm and buildings in the first Ordnance Survey, 1868

stone being recycled into newer versions of older buildings.

Many of the buildings on either side of the high street date from the early 1800s. The road that now runs to the rear of the High Street cut through land and a possibly much older boundary wall. The boundary can still be seen where the road cut through it, potentially the boundary between the estate of Port St Mary and Ballavara Abbeyland.

Unfortunately many build-

ings have already been lost in Port St Mary. Across the road from the Bay View Hotel in the 1970s the Wesleyan Chapel was demolished as the road needed widening, the Garden of Remembrance is located where the Chapel once stood. Further up the road stood the National School, it later became a town hall where concerts and other events were held, at some point the building was knocked down, although part of the gable



This building now contains apartments. It was an ex-woollen mill, ex-warehouse and smaller private residence (Author)

wall remains covered in ivy alongside the Carrick Steps across the road from St Mary's Church.

**O**ne of the most significant buildings lost was St Mary's Keeill that gives the port its name, there are no pictures of it or where it was exactly located. On the first surveyed map of the island by John Speed dated 1605 there is a church clearly marked at

Port St Mary, the church possibly was still a fairly substantial structure to have been shown on the map as often in early maps buildings that appeared were used as landmarks from the sea. Feltham on his tour of the Island in 1798 mentions the 'ruins of an old chapel'. In around 1876 in an archaeological commission of keills it mentions that 'in a field adjoining Ballacreggan are the remains of St Mary's Chapel, Keeill Wooirrey and

burial ground – little to be seen.

The stones were taken to build the farmers dwelling house'. Latterly during building works in the late 19th century and early 20th century graves and bones have been found on various occasions throughout the area near to Chapel Gate on both sides of the present Bay View Road.

The portion of the 1834 plan pictured (bottom right) shows buildings around the





This view from an old post card of Primrose Terrace and the Bay Hotel (Clucas Collection)

LOT 6.—All and Singular, that capital HOTEL, called "PORT LE MURRAY HOTEL," with the Coach-houses, Sheds, eight-stalled Stable and Premises, now in occupation of Mr. Miller, as tenant, at the very low rent of £30, including the portion of the Brows in front of the said Premises to the sea-shore. Possession on the 12th of May next.

The Bay View Hotel was Lot no.6 in the 1857 auction (courtesy of MNH)

area of The Lhargan including a building in the position of the present Bay View Hotel. There have been documentary references to a hotel being in that location for more than 170 years.

In 1842 the tenant of the Port St Mary Hotel (Purt Le Murray Hotel as it was sometimes known as) was a James Kneale, in 1846 it was a James McKenzie, and by May 1848 John Leece Kermod was the proprietor.

The land it stood on was Abbeyland. It had passed into possession of the Duke of Atholl then sold on to James Holmes the banker.

Part of Ballavrara was subdivided at some point and became part of the estate of Ballacreggan, a model farmhouse and buildings built around 1800 (designed by George Steurt architect for the Duke of Atholl).

In 1857 in chancery between the Clerk of the Rolls and the Receiver General, Samuel Harris administrator of James Holmes and others, an auction was held of 'the estates of Port St Mary, Ballacreggan, 'Ring Willan', the Smelt, Port St Mary Hotel, eight stables, coach offices, premises, land, businesses, dwellings, lime kilns'.

The Port St Mary Hotel was lot number 6 at the auction. The following year in a registered deed it states that the ho-

tel, stables, outbuildings, land and premises were sold to the tenant, Thomas Miller, as he was the highest bidder at £410. By the 1860s the hotel was usually known as Miller's Hotel, in Porter's directory of 1889 the hotel was named as the Bay View Hotel, from which coaches left at 9am and 3pm every day for the island's old capital of Castletown.

On December 29 1852 within the walls of this hotel, evidence was heard from the witnesses of the Brig Lily disaster of Kitterland at the Coroner's bi-lingual inquest, held in Manx and English as there were still many people who could only speak Manx at the hearing.

The day before 29 men from the Port St Mary area had lost their lives in an explosion leaving more than 20 widows and some 70 children without their fathers.

Through the 20 and into the 21st century, the Bay View Hotel remained at the heart of much of the community, including Davy Knowles and Back Door Slam!

Port St Mary has an historic harbour and many historically interesting buildings which are actually a national asset.

It's an attractive interesting place because it is still relatively unspoilt and retains its maritime roots within its present built environment.



National School across the road from St Mary's Church (note no steeple) and the row of thatched cottages in the foreground on the Lhargan (Private Collection)

# We should protect port's old buildings

**A**s I write this article, the Bay View Hotel has a planning application pinned to its front door for complete demolition and replacement with three apartments.

Personally I feel it is important the island retains as many of the older buildings as possible as they reflect the unique character, history and heritage of the island and often have stories to tell – the Bay View Hotel certainly does.

There has been a strong tradition of reusing and incorporating older buildings into new ones in Port St Mary and throughout the island.

This building, of locally sourced materials, and which may pre-date 1834, fits within the present streetscape and has been part of the history, heritage and community of Port St Mary for many generations. Maybe it is no

longer financially feasible as a pub but its future function could be sustainably changed as according to the planning application it is structurally sound.

The hotel is not the prettiest architecturally of buildings, but it does stand within the boundaries of a proposed Conservation Area in the Southern Area Plan adopted by Tynwald in 2012.

To quote the Isle of Man Government website 'because of the special nature of Conservation Areas, there are tighter planning controls and obligations in respect of demolition, new development, property alterations and advertisements and signs.' Also within the Manx government's building conservation online information it states: 'Our historic environment is a central part of our cultural heritage and our sense of national identity. It

gives us a tangible link with our history and an irreplaceable record which contributes in many ways to our understanding of both the present and the past.

'It adds to the quality of our lives, by enhancing the familiar and cherished local scene and sustaining the sense of our island's distinctiveness which is so important an aspect of the character and appearance of our towns, villages and countryside'.

Unfortunately government has not yet completed adoption of the Conservation Areas for Port St Mary (and several other communities) in the approved Southern Area Plan, so the protection described above does not yet extend to the Bay View Hotel or the heart of Port St Mary. These Conservation Areas should be brought into force as soon as possible; meantime the Bay View Hotel should be

added to the Protected Buildings Register and conserved for the future cultural heritage of the island.

Looking at the wider Manx situation, I do wonder often why, when there are so many buildings and houses for sale or empty throughout the island, why more do continue to be built.

Furthermore, considering that the technology exists to creatively reuse and recycle buildings of historical character for modern sustainable living, I also wonder why many historic buildings that have stood for hundreds of years are being razed to the ground to be replaced by clone monoculture style houses (that might not even make it to a hundred years) – losing our individual community character and heritage beneath concrete and Chinese granite.

Cathy Clucas



A view of the Bay View Hotel in the early 20th century looking up from the present High Street, the Wesleyan Chapel on the right was knocked down in the 1970s so the road could be widened. The present Garden of Remembrance is located where the chapel once stood (Private Collection)



This 1834 plan clearly shows the boundary between Abbeyland and Port St Mary Estate (Author)