

BUILDINGS AT RISK

The time has come for the Manx Government to take positive action to secure the architectural heritage of the setting before

The Nunnery is steeped in history but sadly neglected

By Peter Kelly, Isle of Man Victorian Society

We are to be Gothic, the situation will be delightful!

The words written in her diary on June 2 1823 by Isabella Curwen Goldie (née Taubman). She was the second daughter of Major Taubman, Speaker of the House of Keys, and 19 years earlier had married Lt Col Goldie of 6th Dragoon Guards.

By now he was a Lieutenant General and they had a house in Bath and Harley Street in London. Her father died in Bath in December 1822, although his body was brought back to the island for burial at Malew.

The estate of The Nunnery passed into her care for her eldest son, who at that time was only 17 years old.

The house at The Nunnery was a typical Georgian-styled property, close to the remains of what was believed to be the chapel from the old nunnery. It was in need of repair and the Goldies engaged the services of John Pinch Junior, an architect of Bath, to produce plans to enlarge and enhance their Island home.

He did not travel over to see it, but worked from measurements taken by Major Shum, a friend of the Taubman family. John Pinch's plans were for an extension, but also to change the elevation to the then popular Gothic style. General Goldie wanted to encourage his architect to come to the island to lay out the grounds also.

On June 11 1823, work started on digging the foundations for the extension. Isabella Goldie was disappointed that John Pinch was not with them. He arrived the next day, but disappointed her further for he condemned the house of her childhood and one-time home of the Heywood family. Pinch selected an alternative elevated site within the grounds and then produced plans for a completely new house which was in fact smaller than the old

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All that remains today of the winter garden

one which in turn was to be retained until the new house was complete.

Major Taubman, her father, had already considered building a new house and had stone waiting in his quarry. One of the large stones from the garden was, however, used as a foundation stone on Thursday, June 26.

A sandpit was opened on the estate in the valley between Douglas and Peel. It contained a high percentage of shingle and was intended for use by the masons engaged on the job. Freestone from Workington was imported for the dressed stone around windows and doors.

The joinery contract was let to John Radcliffe of Douglas who agreed to carry out the work for half the official rate charged 12 years earlier in Liverpool by joiners. He went bankrupt when the work was

complete. Isabella Goldie died in June 1824, quite probably having never moved into her Gothic house. The old house was demolished and the materials put up for sale in September 1828.

A gate lodge was built during 1835 at the entrance to the estate nearest to Kewaigue, probably to the designs of John Welch who undertook other work for the family around this time. As time went by, the house grew in size as the fortunes of the family increased.

The distinctive arched entrance and gatehouse on what was really the rear drive was only built in 1904 and the tower on the right-hand side of the house in 1910, both to the designs of George Kay, the architect.

Captain Fry-Goldie-Taubman was the last to live at The Nunnery in an unchanged state. His successor was Mr Robert Bacchus-Goldie-Taub-

man who, whilst installing a ground floor kitchen, only had three years to enjoy his inheritance as his sudden death brought to an end 186 years of Taubman ownership.

There then followed a succession of owners, Judah Binstock, the Isle of Man Government (twice), Robert Sangster, Graham Ferguson-Lacey, but at all times, whilst the importance of the buildings was readily recognised, it was never registered.

In 2015, a report was commissioned by government which strongly recommended the registration of most of the buildings and the creation of a conservation area for the whole estate.

Minister Ronan advised in August of that year that there was no need to register the buildings as they were not in danger of demolition; instead, the planners would work in close co-operation with the owner.

Why not Register when the evidence was very strong? Minister Boot made a very

pointed remark in the House when answering a question in October 2017.

He was quoted in the local press as saying 'We would all accept that this is a high-profile building of merit. However, the Government decided not to Register it prior to, or at the point of, sale.'

In October 2016, planning approval was given to the new owner to demolish Victorian and more modern buildings to the side of the house and to erect a new, large, flat-roofed multi-purpose building between the house and stable yard.

It is to be built partly in stone with red concrete door and window surrounds, then an upper storey of 'timber-effect' boarding.

If the house and stable yard were registered, this new application could well have been refused as compromising the

registered buildings. Instead, this appears to be the result of 'working with the planners'.

Had the proposed building been built in the paddock facing the house and on the lines of the award winning café at The Sound, the old and the new would not be in conflict with each other and what a view from the building that could be used for all sorts of functions.

In the meantime, the remains of the winter garden (partly removed by the Sangsters when building the indoor swimming pool), together with the adjoining grotto and water feature, referred to in the 2015 report, have been swept away. A loss forever.

Surely now the time has come for government to grasp the nettle and register the buildings before our architectural heritage is lost forever?

The Nunnery is truly a building at risk.

'We would all accept that this is a high-profile building of merit. However, the government decided not to register it'

it falls prey to the ravages of time and lack of resources



Captain Fry-Goldie-Taubman, owner of the house from 1946 to 1972. He left it to his nephew Robert Bacchus who had to change his name by deed poll to Bacchus-Goldie-Taubman in order to inherit.



The Winter Garden which led from the dining room to the glass houses and the garden



Isabella Goldie's Gothic House in the 1840s after the first extension had been built. The bay window in the centre of the house was matched by one on the rear



No 1 and 2 Hawthorn Villas on the Castletown Road as built by J C Barry and Sons. Many will recall them in the early 1970s as 'The Sizzler' restaurant before it moved to Onchan



Old Nunnery House located where the Bothy Yard now stands

Planning played a damaging role in site

In the Isle of Man Examiner of August 16 2016, we featured the loss of warehouse buildings on the North and South Quays of Douglas.

Once there were many of these tall stone-built structures with external hoists to take goods to the upper floors.

In recent years, though, the Corlett, Sons and Cowley warehouse built on the site of the old Customs House on North Quay was demolished, save for the front wall which was incorporated into a new office block.

Riley's warehouse was approved for conversion to residential use and then demolished and replaced by a poor replica building.

The only old warehouse left is what until recently has been Newson's Trading Company, but is there hope?

The planning and building control section of the Department of the Environment, Food and Agriculture has recently placed a notice in the local press to advise of its intention to register the building (17/00289 REG BL).

An apparent lack of local architectural and historic knowledge means they have overlooked Newson's shop next door but one.

This was once Forbes' Bank, run by the father of Edward Forbes the great naturalist and professor who is known the world over. It has its own importance.

Moving on to the Isle of Man Bank in Athol Street, featured in the Examiner edition of December 13 2016, when we told how the bank had applied for planning approval to alter the interior of this flagship building.

Somewhere in the planning office it was decided to ignore this damaging part of the application and instead the application was reduced to an external ramp and advertising

signage. Now that the interior has been ruined in the eyes of so many, the planning office has given notice of the intention of Registering No.2 Athol Street (17/00290 REG BL).

Unlike Newson's, they have not referred to it as the Isle of Man Bank – just No.2 Athol Street. It is actually 2-12 Athol Street and the plan attached to the notice shows that it includes NatWest International.

Taken literally, No.2 only covers one quarter of the Isle of Man Bank and is open to legal challenge. (NB. the notice in the Isle of Man Courier did call it the Isle of Man Bank but gave less than the minimum of 21 days in which to make comment).

Finally, an article on Moderne Architecture appeared in the Examiner of July 18 and proved of interest to readers.

Ewan Davidson advised that his father, A J Davidson, designed The Nook Cafe, rather than Claude Kneen.

Well, that's true, Alex Davidson produced the original concept plan but Claude was what today we call the

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'job architect' and took on the production of plans (his name appears on them) and took control of the job.

The article did prompt Catherine James to get in touch

and forward a picture of a pair of bungalows that her father, J C Barry of Mount Murray Cottages, built and owned.

The plans were approved on September 13 1935. When it was being rendered, he added his own decoration which took away the clear lines of a moderne building.

The bungalows were called Hawthorn Villas and adjoined the lodge to Mount Murray.

They still exist, but have changed considerably over the years.