

BUILDINGS AT RISK

Historic Ballaughton estate: it's a cautionary tale of loss

In this week's Buildings at Risk, Susan Temple looks at an historic estate on the outskirts of Douglas, which at one time had three grand villas or houses. Two were lost, but the jewel of Ballaughton Manor was supposed to be saved – sadly Ballaughton has now been lost as well.

Screened by trees, three fine grand houses once stood on the west side of the New Castle-town Road on the approach to the Quarterbridge.

These weren't just single-family houses, they were estates, supporting not only those who lived and worked on the estates themselves, on their farms and at their mills; but also the wider community.

They have undoubtedly evolved, and new chapters were written, but have now all been wiped off the face of the earth. First Springfield and Harcroft; there was still Ballaughton – but now all are gone.

This is the story of an estate, its fragmentation, and the main player and the last to be lost - Ballaughton.

Ballaughton, Harcroft and Springfield were three regency villas, originally in the Parish of Braddan, about two miles outside Douglas.

Manorial Rolls dating back to the Bishop's Barony of 1580 show that the whole of the Ballaughton Estate was held by one Henry Crye.

In 1583 he was succeeded by John Aughton, who gave his name to the house 'Ballaughton'.

In 1585 the Quarterland was divided into two equal parts, one held by the Corkills and the other the Curleuds.

The Ballaughton Curleud land remained in their family for more than 200 years, until 1805, when it was bought by Harrison of the Woodbourne Estate for £5,000.

Within the next 25 years, two houses were constructed, Harcroft and Springfield.

The Ballaughton Corkills sold their half in 1808 to Mungo Murray, of the Duke of Atholl's entourage, for £4,157.

In 1813, Murray sold part of the estate to the Duke for £500, and in 1820 sold a further portion for £500 to Colonel Mark Wilks, the owner of the neighbouring estate of Kirby and who had been Governor of St Helena when Napoleon Bonaparte was exiled there.

This presumably included the site of 'St Helena' (since lost through demolition), which was said to have been used as the 'Kirby' residence



Ballaughton as it stood until recently

when the present Kirby House was being completed.

In 1824 the Duke of Atholl sold his portion of land to John Wulff a lawyer of Swedish descent from Liverpool for £5,000, and it is he who built the last Ballaughton Mansion House in the late 1820s.

In 1826, Wulff set up a bank in partnership with Edward Forbes, which in 1836 became the Isle of Man Joint Stock Banking Company, but after the death of Wulff in 1840, it closed in 1843 with debts to its London agent of over £70,000.

The building that housed the Wolff and Forbes bank was one of those on the North Quay mentioned in a previous Buildings at Risk article; unfortunately this premises was omitted from the recent registration of the Newson's warehouse which it adjoined.

Wulff's vault, in Old Kirk Braddan churchyard, is – relatively – on a similar scale to his house at Ballaughton; the inscription, as well as his death, records the death of other members of the family, including John Wulff's two wives, one of whom was 'born at Barbados'.

After John Wulff's death in 1840, the advertisement for Sale offered the house plus 90 acres of 'excellent land', with a hothouse heated by steam, several detached dwellings, coach house, farmhouse and threshing mill.

In 1846, advocate G.W. Dumbell, as Wulff's executor, sold the same portion to Samuel Harris for £7,420 which was later re-transferred to the same G.W. Dumbell!

G.W. Dumbell, founder of Dumbell's Bank, died in 1887, 13 years before the bank failed.

According to the Mona's Herald of June 6, 1906, after the collapse of the Bank 'it was

a common saying amongst old people in the sixties, based on certain transactions, and notably in connection with the Wulffs, former owner of Ballaughton, that the Dumbell family would never survive three generations in this island, and it has come true'.

Dumbell and Harris were to become competitors when High Bailiff Harris took a leading role in setting up the Isle of Man Banking Company Limited in 1865.

It is difficult to imagine how great a part the owners of houses such as Ballaughton played in local society.

They were expected to give generously to local charities and church affairs.

In a time when there was no assistance for the poor except (very uncharitable) indoor and outdoor relief, a

benevolent landowner would provide for the wants and needs of his servants, farm labourers, and their families.

They would be clothed, fed and looked after when they fell sick.

They, in turn, were expected to work hard, go to church regularly and generally be grateful.

In the Victorian age, the ladies of these big houses were expected to support local good works and, particularly in Douglas where there were a number of such houses, take the lead in supporting the Lieutenant Governor and his wife.

In the Isle of Man Examiner of December 3, 1887, an advertisement appears for 'A Grand Bazaar and Sale of Work in aid of the Fund for Establishing Homes for Gentlewomen in Reduced Circumstances under the Distinguished Patronage of the Lieut. Governor and Mrs Spencer Walpole, The

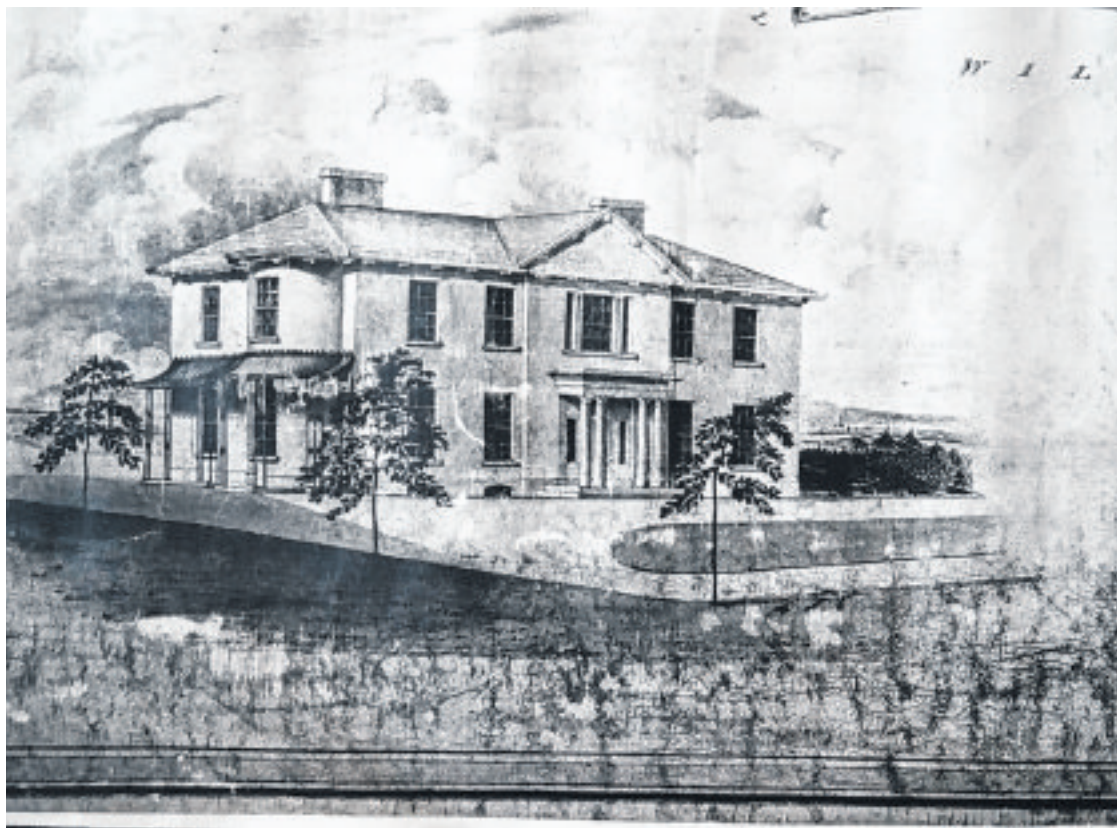
Lord Bishop and Mrs Bardsley, Lady Gell, Mrs Goldie Taubman.....and offering such delights as Concerts, Tableaux Vivants, Wax Works, Pepper's Ghost and other amusements'.

Or for the Kirk Braddan New Organ Fund (Manx Sun 08.10.1892), Bazaar and Free Concert.

In all cases the Ladies' Committee seems to consist of the ladies of the Vicarage, Harcroft, Ballamona, Kirby, Springfield, the Nunnery and Ballaughton.

There was a report of a particularly 'splendid spectacle' in the Mona's Herald of November 30 1910 for the Braddan Christmas Fair and Tree, whose aim was to raise £1,000 (or more) to build a much needed church room.

Lady Raglan was the presiding genius of the tree, and 'she was aided by a company of beautiful fairies in white



John Wulff's Ballaughton drawn by Charles Vignoles in 1829 (Manx Museum Library)

and silver...Lord Raglan had no sooner declared the fair open than the fairies, who had ringed him round, sprang away to the tree, lifting their wands when instantly the tree became resplendent with stars, illuminating the whole space with their streams of light... The fair took place at the Palace, which was decorated to resemble an English village green' There were 18 stalls selling everything from silver and linen to cigars and tobacco.

RECENT HISTORY

Ballaughton was bought by the Father-in-law of Deemster Percy Cowley who gave it to his daughter as a wedding present in 1920.

In 1922, 80 acres of the land was sold to a Mr William David Inston, together with the old farmhouse, stables etc., which he held until his death when the farmhouse and buildings

were bought by Mr Cambell, latterly of Kirby Estates.

In 1937, the Cowleys sold two fields totalling 12.3 acres to the borough of Douglas for the Ballaughton Nurseries, which provides all the plants used today by the borough for their parks and gardens.

Sir Percy Cowley is also known for his generous gift of 763 acres of land above The Sound which formed the basis of the Manx National Trust.

In 1937 Douglas Corporation wished to extend its boundaries to include Pulrose (which at that time was in Braddan).

One of the reasons was that in 1928 the first houses were constructed in Pulrose and the Douglas Corporation buses were only allowed to operate within the town boundary; also there were a number of large houses which they wished to include to bring in more money in rates to Dou-

glas. After the Commission had reported it was eventually agreed to exclude Springfield, Harcroft, Ballaughton and the Nunnery from the redrawn boundary.

They tried again in about 1960, and again the large houses won.

It was not until the current boundaries were drawn that all these buildings were included in Douglas.

Sir Percy and Lady Cowley lived at Ballaughton until their deaths, and after her death in 1959, it was bought by Major Thomas Brownsdon.

Much of the remainder of the Ballaughton land was sold over a period of years, leaving today only the land immediately round the house.

The house itself has since been demolished.

WHAT HAPPENED?

After Springfield and Harcroft were demolished,

the jewel of Ballaughton remained.

In 2013 the Manx Government proposed adding Ballaughton to the Protected Buildings Register.

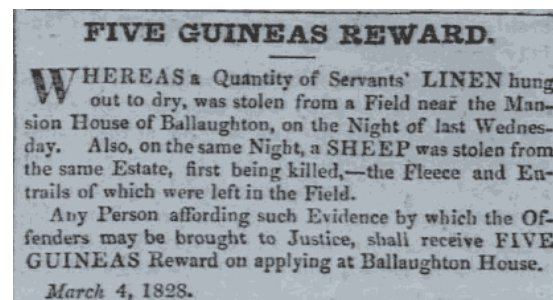
The very detailed 49 page report on the property, its condition and its significance, concludes: '..... Ballaughton House is a major, if not pivotal, example of its genre, the precursor of which led to the wider development of this particular architectural style throughout the island.

'Architecturally it represents a major landmark feature which was quite possibly amongst the first of its kind on the Isle of Man..'

The report goes on to say that Ballaughton House and grounds should be 'placed on the Registered Building list for its architectural heritage, its



Fannin's 1789 map, showing 'Ballaughton Estate' (Manx Museum Library)



A report from the Manx Sun in 1828 (iMuseum)



1869 Ordnance Survey

social and economic relevance and its close historical association to that of the Duke of Athol, George Dumbell et al, and most especially for its extensive retention of original period features throughout set within unspoilt grounds.'

And the government report finishes by saying: 'This is a truly exceptional property worthy of its inclusion onto the protected buildings register.'

However, despite all the work preparing the report, and the weight of evidence, the final steps to add Ballaughton to the Protected Buildings Register never took place.

In 2015 a planning application was made to redevelop the majority of Ballaughton.

Whilst it would have been better to have conserved more, many felt that application - which did at least keep key aspects such as the front-

age and gable bays - was a price worth paying to allow a new sustainable chapter to be written for Ballaughton.

Unfortunately in 2016 the developer/owner changed their minds and applied to raze the site completely.

Whilst the planning appeal inspector dismissed claims that a few scattered traces of asbestos justified demolition, he concluded that the government's neglect to complete the Registration meant that Ballaughton had no protection; and as there was no other control of demolition of free-standing buildings outside conservation areas, there was no means by which Ballaughton could be saved if the owner did not so wish.

We hope and trust that with the recent recruitment of a registered buildings officer we will not see such tragedies in future.



Ballaughton inner hallway



Bow-front gable