

BUILDINGS AT RISK

Does Douglas still deserve title of a heritage harbour?

Frank Cowin remembers some of the buildings in the island's capital that have been 'lost' during his lifetime.

Some few years ago Douglas was proclaiming its 'Heritage Harbour' – now most, but not quite all, of the heritage buildings have been swept away.

Some of the last to go were the Bonded Warehouse and the Steam Packet engineering offices and stores.

The red brick office building was of a type built mainly between 1890 and 1914, using Ruabon brick imported from North Wales in the cargo vessels taking ore from the Laxey mines to the Flintshire smelting establishments which would otherwise have little return cargo apart from the very necessary coal.

Once the moulded red Ruabon bricks became popular some of the local brickworks began to produce a local alternative, the most successful of these was the Ballanard Brickworks.

The Bonded Warehouse was typical of a series of warehouses – mainly on harbour sides and designed by locally born John Taggart, who is buried in Old Kirk Braddan Church Yard. An almost identical warehouse stood on the opposite side of the harbour and was part of Corlett Sons & Cowley's premises.

Both warehouses had a central hoist and loading doors on the long side facing on to the road with a single opening either side of it, whereas some of the otherwise similar warehouses had the hoist and loading doors on the gable.

On The Parade stood the former Royal Hotel latterly Steam Packet offices but originally built as the town house of the Bacon family (see article of September 11). This had been built soon after the completion of the Red Pier in 1803.

Beyond/behind this build-



Above and below, Well Road Hill and Edward Lane before Chester Street car park was built



ing was the Harbour Office, the Steam Packet warehouses and further Steam Packet offices in the Imperial Building, formerly the Imperial Hotel.

All of these were swept away in creating a parking area and goods marshalling yard.

At the inland end of the South Quay, all but one-and-a-bit of the former houses built mainly in the years around 1800 have gone including the Archway giving access to the as-yet surviving Arch Tower House. The character of the North Quay has largely survived along the inner harbour down to the former Douglas Hotel.

This, probably the most important of all the buildings because of its connection with the Running Trade, the Duke of Athol, the Heywood family and so to stories of the Bounty Mutiny and Cook's expeditions to the Pacific, has been extensively rebuilt internally.

The surviving Swing Bridge Control Tower and its very im-



Mic Mac Boutique in Nelson Street, Douglas



Wellington Street, Douglas (March 1974)

portant machinery is another story but it is important in so many different ways.

It is perhaps a candidate for treatment in a similar fashion to the Camera Obscura with government responsible for the structure but an appropriate society or other such group responsible for its day-to-day running. The Chester Street car park saw a whole area cleared, an area of generally small properties in poor repair but full of character.

It is inevitable that some such areas are going to be lost but care needs to be taken that in a desire to update and modernise we do not lose those places, which create the character which appeals to locals and visitors alike.

Another area which was subject to wholesale change is the Wellington Street – Drinkwater Street redevelopment into the present Marks and Spencer store and car park.

Many have fond memories of the great sweep of plate glass windows of T.H. Cowin's shop, and inside its pneumatic payment/receipt system with its networks of tubes.

On the other side of Duke Street was R.C. Cain with a payment/receipt system of carriers on wheels travelling overhead on parallel wires.

This site is the subject of a current application for a building of much greater height than those presently there which keep to a fairly uniform height throughout

this area of the town.

The rear wall of the R.C. Cain car park and linoleum sales building across the extension of Fort Street at the rear of the main building was one of the two then-remaining sections of the old sea wall.

This was supposed to be retained within the proposed Town Square, which has not yet progressed.

The old sea wall remained for some weeks before vanishing over one weekend.

The now one surviving section – part of the rear wall of W.H. Smith on Howard Street – ought to have a suitable plaque on it explaining what it is.

Where the entrance and exit to the Marks and Spencer car park is now was the site of



Bonded Warehouse, Douglas (March 1973)



Victoria Street Methodist Church (inside) (1972)



Douglas Harbour swing bridge control tower (1974)



Victoria Street Methodist Church (outside) (1972)



Douglas Sea Wall (Villiers site)

Corrin's Sweet and Ice Cream Shop, later to become the Mic Mac Boutique.

Mr Corrin was the one-armed ice cream man going out making sales from his tricycle with an ice cream container on the front. His shop was always suspected to be the recipient of the collection monies of youngsters on their way to Thomas Street Sunday School on the other side of Wellington Street.

The first Methodist Chapel in Douglas was erected on land called Corrin's Concern purchased in 1786 and an adjoining piece of land, Tennison's Concern was purchased in 1818 and a new bigger chapel built on it facing Thomas Street, which had started to develop about 1810.

Following the creation of Victoria Street the Chapel was remodelled both inside and out reopening in 1892 as Victoria Street Wesleyan Methodist Church, it was the biggest Methodist building on the island and was said to seat 1,000.

The original chapel building became the Sunday School building but was destroyed in a fire in 1839.

This was rebuilt and later extended but throughout had kept the Thomas Street name right up until it moved to the new Promenade Methodist Church in 1976.

Victoria Street Church and the Sunday School buildings were closed, sold and subsequently demolished and replaced by the Celtic Bank building, which was later sold and becoming the Barclays Bank building.

Some of these 'losses' are a result of a single planning decision, others have happened as a result of a number of de-

isions, some of which may even have been simply owners without planning permission sought or perhaps necessary.

The heritage element of Douglas Harbour has been severely eroded but not yet entirely lost. What happens with regards to the North Quay site currently under consideration, and what is to be done on the South Quay, is critical and will decide whether the heritage label is deserved.

In the historic story, the heritage term is more than justified as so much maritime history has its root in this area.

In physical appearance, will it still be deserved? I sincerely hope so!



Douglas South Quay - The Arches (1974)

Wrecking planning? A last chance to have your say

Almost all of these buildings mentioned opposite have gone, many destroyed by a wrecking ball.

It now appears that the government is intent on doing the same with some of our planning legislation.

Following an unsatisfactory consultation based on anecdotal evidence, the Department of the Environment, Food and Agriculture recently issued an 'operational policy' restricting those to whom 'interested party' status could be granted.

This policy more or less limits it to just local authorities and some government departments, and those who own land within 20 metres of a site.

It completely removes the

chance of bodies such as heritage trusts, the antiquarians, the Wildlife Trust etc participating fully in the planning process to defend our island.

All a developer has to do is ensure they own land out to 20 metres beyond the planned development. Anyone can still object, but this new policy prevents just about anyone who is concerned from taking it to appeal, no matter how damaging the plan may be.

Now, a consultation has been launched into proposed changes to the Town & Country Planning Act. There are three concerning aspects to the proposals.

Firstly, it would empower the Council of Ministers to make 'policy directives' which can trump any area plans etc. Secondly, it specifies that any sizeable application may be

called in for determination by CoMin, hence removing scrutiny by the planning committee.

Thirdly, for some time the Government has neglected to follow their statutory obligations to appoint an advisory committee under section 40 of the Town and Country Planning Act (1999).

This proposed amendment 'clarifies' it by making it optional for the government to appoint this committee.

Details of this current consultation can be found via the government's 'consultation hub' web site at consult.gov.im/ or by telephoning the Cabinet Office on 685750.

Consultation on these changes closes on October 31, and we would urge everyone to consider the proposals and respond as they see fit.