

BUILDINGS AT RISK

Thomas Brine's legacy: a jail, courthouses and churches

In this week's *Building at Risk*, Frank Cowin looks at the second of the three Bishop Ward-era church architects, Thomas Brine, who is better known for his work for the Duke of Atholl and some of the island's larger houses.

Thomas Brine came to the island in about 1810 as clerk of works to the Barracks Office and produced plans for, and supervised, the work of turning Castle Rushen into the island's prison.

This work included putting in 'the prison staircase' to give good access to all the main areas of the castle and also the installation of the slate slab floors and ceiling which are such a feature of the building.

Also included were repairs to roofs, floors and the provision of extra toilet facilities, and a house for the head gaoler.

Only one section of his prison period timber floor survives, in part of the small side room off the 'prison staircase' at first floor level.

Being a prison floor meant that no nails could be used, and so boards were pegged to the joists instead.

Most of the additional toilets have gone and the gaoler's house demolished.

Brine was careful to detail the door heads to match the original but in a slightly different material – a man ahead of his time.

Armitage Rigby, some 80 years later returning the building to its original form, also left evidence of anything he changed.

In 1813 when designing the requested navigation marks for Langness (now known as the Herring Tower) and on Douglas Head now forming the central feature of the apartment block and prior to that, the Hotel (see *Buildings at Risk* of May 23, 2017) he followed very closely the design of the 'Irish' round tower on St Patrick's Isle, Peel.

He produced drawings for munitions stores and gun batteries on Douglas Head and at Gob-n-y-Rona (Port e Vullen, Maughold).

When his work for the military here was at an end in 1815 he was to be posted elsewhere, but he resigned from The Barracks Office as he had developed such a big private practice here.

Much of his 'private' work was for the Duke of Atholl, for whom George Steuart – a Scottish architect – had designed the Castle Mona as the Ducal Mansion, the Red Pier, and also the Courthouse at Ramsey.



Three of Thomas Brine's Castletown buildings – on the left the former George/Barracks; centre Brine's office; right the Market Hall and Assembly Room

The Duke as manorial lord was responsible for much of the infrastructure, and so Brine was involved with places like the Old House of Keys building and with court houses at Peel and Kirk Michael.

Designs for all of these had already been prepared for the Duke by George Steuart, Brine amended these designs but followed the overall appearance of them fairly closely.

The Kirk Michael Courthouse is being allowed to continue to deteriorate despite it being on the Protected Buildings Register (see *Buildings at Risk* of February 14, 2017).

Brine also designed the Records Office, which stood on the plot opposite the current Bus Station on Lord Street.

After a second storey was added to the Records Office it became Douglas Town Hall, the Customs House, and later still briefly known as Seneschal House, but is now demolished.

Brine also designed St Mary's Anglican Church Castletown (now offices)



Original Castletown Lifeboat House

as well as St Mary's Catholic Church in Bowling Green Road, Castletown.

A number of houses on the north side of The Parade near to St Mary's are thought to have been designed by Brine.

His work also included the Castletown Market Hall and Assembly Room (now Barclays Bank) on the site of the Baby Tower of the Castle which had controlled the outer postern gate.

Across the junction of

Malew Street into the Square, and turning the corner into Arbory Street, he designed and built the former Callister's Grocery Shop, now a chemists.

Its shallowly bowed front becoming flat at the corners echoes the end wall of St Mary's facing down Queen Street. It was to this corner building Thomas Brine moved his offices.

On this part of Castletown Market Place, Brine designed



Old House of Keys, Castletown

the replacement George Hotel when the previous George had become beyond repair.

The previous George had originally been the Governor's House, and at least part of it shows on one of Daniel King's drawings of 1651.

Brine's George Hotel was sold when the Duke of Atholl finally severed his connections with the island, and became the Barracks for the Army troops stationed in Castletown.

Having been Castletown Town Hall, then offices, and now a coffee shop and fitness centre, it still survives.

The sale of Brine's George Hotel and its conversion into the Barracks led to the erection of the present John Welch designed George Hotel on the nearby plot.

Lorne House was altered and extended by Brine, having possibly been designed by George Steuart (see *Buildings at Risk* of February 28, 2017).



Kirk Michael Courthouse (2017)

Old Courthouse, Peel



Milntown, library to the right of the front door



St Mary's Anglican Church Castletown, with original octagonal turret atop the tower



Douglas Customs House, formerly the Records (or Rolls) office



Columns by Thomas Brine - left St Mary's Anglican Church, Castletown; centre Lorne House; right St Mary's Catholic Church, Castletown

The 'Brine' cluster columns are used at Lorne House as they are at the two St Mary's churches.

Brine designed Beach House, Douglas Street, Castletown for a Deemster who unfortunately died before its completion.

This property stands on land originally part of the Lorne House estate.

Having bought part of the Lord's Garden, Brine built the larger houses at the Arbory Street end of what is now The Crofts and his widow occupied one of these after Thomas died.

It is suggested that Brine had undertaken work to the house at Kentraugh but the decorative work and the detail of the columns appears closer to that of George Steuart than that of Brine.

Brine, however, is thought to have been responsible for work at the outbuildings es-

pecially the decorative tower which has similarities to the tower, in its original form, of St Mary's Anglican Church at Castletown.

Unfortunately the octagonal turreted top at Castletown had to be removed at the start of the 20th century when it was said to sway in gale force winds.

A Lieutenant Black and Thomas Brine are reported to have broken ribs when their two-wheeled gig overturned returning from Mount Gawne in February 1827.

The report goes to record that 'a great number of accidents with that sort of vehicle, and four-wheeled chairs were much safer'.

Elsewhere in the island his work seems to have included Woodbourne House, now part of the Douglas Masonic Hall which has recently been renovated.

An extension at Milntown

which formed the library with its crenellating and the detail of the fireplace speak of his design, not to mention the fact that in 1840 his daughter married the son of Deemster Christian of Milntown.

The fireplace in Milntown Library is similar to one in the library at the Nunnery, Douglas, where Brine may have been responsible for some of the alterations and extensions to the building originally designed by John Pinch junior of Bath.

In Ramsey, Thomas Brine designed St Paul's Church in 1822, but this building has since been altered and extended by many others, including John Welch.

Thomas Brine was a member of the Castletown Committee of the Royal National Institution for the Preserva-



Douglas Head Herring tower

tion of Life from Shipwreck - later simplified in 1854 to the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI).

The Castletown Committee at their meeting in May 1826 instructed: 'That a shed

be built in the situation already marked out, and now approved of by the Lieut-Governor; and also that a Truck be constructed under the direction of Mr Brine.'

That Lifeboat House abutted the Castle Gate House to the north of the 'Glue Pot', and was later demolished and replaced with one on the outer harbour.

Brine also had a 'side line' as agent for Lloyd's insurance and in this role he supplemented the crew of the Castletown lifeboat on December 7, 1828 when they launched to attend the wooden steam packet 'Earl of Roden' which had been driven onto the rocks at Derbyhaven.

Along with George Quirk, Water Bailiff, and William Henry Carrington, Comptroller of Customs, he was able to stop a large number of passengers from rioting and firing weapons into the air and

from jumping into the sea; telling them that they were safe on board and would be able to get ashore safely when the tide went out.

The ship was later refloated on December 22 and saved.

Brine along with Messrs Quirk and Carrington were awarded the Silver Gallantry Medal of the RNLI.

His maritime activities not only brought him a medal but were also the cause of his death.

As Lloyd's agent he was on-board the barque 'Kingston' of Liverpool when it became stranded at Port St Mary in August 1838 and was seriously injured, and died as a result of these injuries on January 28, 1840.

His son, also Thomas, was immediately appointed Lloyd's agent in his father's place, and also continued the family connection with the RNLI.