

BUILDINGS AT RISK

John Taggart: Was he the first Manx-born 'architect'?

In this week's *Building at Risk*, Frank Cowin looks at the last of the three Bishop Ward era church architects, John Taggart, who designed churches, chapels, public and commercial buildings, and also drew one of the earliest street plans encompassing the whole of Douglas.

This week's article concludes the consideration of churches and chapels built during (or just before) the tenure of Bishop Ward, through the architects responsible for them.

John Taggart is the first Manx-born 'architect' of whom we are aware, but like most at that time he was also a builder.

He was involved in the building, or re-building, of Kirby for Colonel Sir Mark Wilks, around 1810.

This is in keeping with Taggart's other projects, most of which are large buildings.

Soon after this he is involved under Thomas Brine in the work being carried out at Castle Rushen.

At this time he was asked to undertake work at St Mary's Anglican Church, Castletown.

This was probably the addition on the town side of the 'old' Bishop Wilson church of 1698 to create an extra aisle.

This was suggested by Bishop Murray in 1817 and it was completed and consecrated – but the people were annoyed with the way it had been done without any vestry meeting.

As a result in 1824, when the roof and walls of the old building were reported to be ruinous and dangerous, it was demolished and the commission for the new building went to Thomas Brine.

John Taggart had laid out Athol Street, Douglas, as building plots in 1810 and also designed the first building to be erected there, the National School, which much later became Karran's Knitwear factory, and later still offices, before being demolished and replaced by the unfortunately-named 'Heritage House'.

Some of what are now offices in Athol Street were also his handiwork, being built as houses for professional men who later began to use room(s) as their offices.

He designed and built one of the first of the Bishop Ward churches, All Saints' Lonan, the foundation stone of which was laid in 1830 but it was not consecrated until 1835 due to 'disputes with the builder'. Despite this one of the pinnacle bears the date 1834.

This building replaces a previous one on this site, which it-



All Saints, Lonan



self was in place of the original church, St Adamnan's, which is sited in one corner of the parish and therefore created problems

of access for many of the parishioners.

Visiting English ecclesiastical architecture critic John

Mason Neale, writing in of Taggart's All Saints in 1848, simply says: 'This is also a modern building with an ugly tower...'

This building has ceased to be used as the Parish Church. Christ Church Laxey is now being used and All Saints' is currently being transferred to the care of a trust to be used for community purposes.

Taggart was also responsible for a number of Methodist and other denominational chapels of which the largest was Thomas Street Wesleyan Methodist Chapel which as its name suggests was sited on Thomas Street.

After Victoria Street was

'punched through' the old streets of Douglas in the 1870s, the Thomas Street Chapel had a complete internal refit and 'dressed up' the facades facing the public roads although the face away from the roads was left in its undressed stone finish.

The chapel name was changed to that of the Victoria Street but Thomas Street itself still exists and is the approach road to the Marks and Spencer car park (and the new Premier Inn).

The chapel and its Sunday

School building however were demolished to make way for Barclays Bank and its car park (see Buildings at Risk of October 9, 2018).

When Primitive Methodism arrived in the early 1830s Taggart was responsible for their first chapel in Douglas close to Thomas Street in what is now Wellington Street – but previously known as Factory Lane and/or Preaching House Lane.

The building itself being one of those demolished to make way for the Marks and Spencer building.

Not far away, and also now demolished, was Wellington Hall, the building also by Tag-



Corlett Sons and Cowley warehouse, South Quay, Douglas (demolished)



Independent Chapel, Athol Street, Douglas (demolished)



John Taggart's plan of Douglas 1833-4

gart erected to be the Douglas Covered Market – only for its owners to find that the stall holders preferred to stay out in the rain rather than pay them to be indoors.

This building externally was

very similar to Thomas Street Chapel, and was latterly better known to many as 'MGM'.

As Douglas expanded another chapel was built this time on Well Road Hill again by Taggart, and again demolished, this

time to make way for Markwell House.

The Independent Chapel on Athol Street was yet another designed by Taggart and all his chapels could be said to have a 'family likeness'.

The not-so-enduring fate of the three Bishop Ward-era architects

Architect	Building	Status	
John Welch	Churches - C of E		
	St Peter's, Orchan	In original use, some alterations	Registered
	St Mary's new church, Ballaugh	In original use, some alterations	Registered
	Kirk Christ, Lezayre	Closed, probably transferring to community	Registered
	St Stephen's, Sulby	In original use, additions and alterations *	Registered
	St Luke's, Beldwin	In original use, additions and alterations *	Registered
	St James, Dalby	In original use, additions and alterations *	Registered
	Parish Church, Kirk Michael	In original use, some minor alterations	Registered
	St Bernabie, Douglas	* School use of part of building discontinued	Demolished
	Churches & Chapels - other		
	Scotch Kirk (St Andrew's), Douglas		Demolished
	Public Buildings etc.		
	King William's College	Greatly extended and altered	Registered
	Peel Castle Hotel	In original use, much renovated	Registered
	Castle Mona conversion to Hotel	Altered	Registered
George Hotel, Castletown	Altered	Registered	
Tower of Refuge		Registered	
Street Memorial	Some doubtful additions!	Registered	
Houses etc.			
Harold Tower, Douglas	In original use, altered	Registered	
Therrion, Douglas	Demolished but replaced with replica x 1 + 1	Demolished	
Herritage, Douglas		Demolished	
Fort Anne, Douglas	Alterations and possible extensions, none	Demolished	
Thomas Brine	Churches - C of E		
	St Mary's C of E, Castletown	Converted into offices	Registered
	St Paul's, Ramsey	Altered and extended by others, in original use	Registered
	Churches & Chapels - other		
	St Mary's RC, Castletown	Altered and extended by others, in original use	Registered
	Public Buildings etc.		
	Old House of Keys, Castletown	Altered (now MWH property)	Registered
	Kirk Michael Courthouse	DETERIORATING	Registered
	Peel Old Courthouse	Peel Museum	Registered
	Relief Office / Town Hall / Schoolmaster's House		Demolished
	Castletown Market & Assembly Hall	Barclays Bank (MWH property)	Registered
	Prison etc works to Castle Rushen	Altered for display purposes (MWH property)	Registered
	Original Lifesaver House, Castletown		Demolished
	Douglas Gun Battery	Derec[?] and abandoned!	Registered
	Longcross daymark (Herring) tower		Registered
Douglas daymark (Herring) tower	Surrounded by new apartments	Registered	
Houses, Shops etc.			
Alterations to Lorne House, Castletown	Some further alterations	Registered	
Beach House, Castletown	In original use	Registered	
Houses on The Parade, Castletown	Generally in original use	Registered	
Lloyd's Chemist, Castletown		Registered	
Former George Hotel/Baracks, Castletown	Multi-use	Registered	
Houses at Southern end of The Crofts,	In original use	Registered	
Woodbourne House, Douglas	Now part of Douglas Masonic Hall	Registered	
Additions/alterations to Milltown	Trust property open to the public	Registered	
John Taggart	Churches - C of E		
	Additions to St. Mary's C of E, Castletown	Moving into Community use	Demolished
	All Saints, Lonan		Demolished
	Churches & Chapels - other		
	Thomas Street Methodist, Douglas	Altered, but now	Demolished
	Well Road Hill Methodist, Douglas	Altered, but now	Demolished
	Wellington Street Methodist, Douglas	Altered use, then	Demolished
	Independent Chapel, Athol St, Douglas	Altered use, then	Demolished
	Public Buildings etc.		
	National School, Athol St, Douglas	Altered, but now	Demolished
Wellington Hall, Duke St, Douglas	Altered & use changed, then	Demolished	
Houses			
Kirk, Bredellan	In original use	Registered	
Houses in Athol St, Douglas	Change of use to offices and then but nos 23-31 survive and are	Registered	
Warehouses etc.			
Corlett Sons & Cowley, S Quay, Douglas		Demolished	
Bonded Warehouse, Douglas		Demolished	

Again, the Independent Chapel was demolished to be replaced with offices.

In its original form, the chapel was upstairs with three shops or workshops below – these at various times including an organ builder and Bregazzi's Gilders and Framers.

Taggart also designed many of the quayside warehouses which were once so common but have now almost completely disappeared (see for example the former Customs Bonded

Warehouse and Corlett Sons & Cowley warehouse in Douglas in Buildings at Risk of October 9, 2018).

In 1834 Taggart produced a street plan of Douglas.

The street plan was one of the earliest to show the whole town which continues to be an extremely useful reference – yet so many of his buildings have disappeared including what was arguably the largest and best of the Methodist churches.

Churches' size in this mod-

ern age is proving to be a liability and threat to survival.

John Taggart died in February 1836, less than two months before the date of John Welch's 'Six Days Tour' and four years before the death of Thomas Brine.

These three men provided, or were involved with, all the best buildings of early years of the 1800s.

The list above shows how far from true is it that 'their legacy lives for ever'?