

BUILDINGS AT RISK

Ramsey foreshore – more than just a line in the sand?

This week, Bob Stimpson, chairman of the Isle of Man Victorian Society, looks at marine heritage on Ramsey's South Shore.

Ramsey is the one port in the island which holds the greatest world-wide interest in terms of maritime history, yet shortly the town could destroy its earliest marine links with the past.

For years the fact that the Star of India was built in Ramsey has been well known across the world and this knowledge is now enhanced with the fact that the world's first true oil tanker, the Jane, was also launched from the same yard and has featured in the maritime press published in several countries.

Shipbuilding, or perhaps better described as boat building, was undertaken in many of our other island ports but Ramsey had the only true ship building yard with its patent slipway.

William Kennish who surveyed the first route for the Panama Canal worked as a ship carpenter in Ramsey before joining the Royal Navy.

Ramsey can boast being the place where Prince Albert came ashore to be followed some years later by his son Edward VII and Grandson George V.

It was the port from which the Eilan Vannin set off on its last fateful journey – but Ramsey has another very important maritime artefact that no other port on the island possesses. In fact it has two unique features, the remains of former timber constructed landing stages that projected out in to the bay long before the Queen's Pier, itself the only remaining iron pier on the island.

If you stand on the Queen's Promenade in Ramsey, directly opposite the entrance to Marine Gardens, and then turn around to face seawards, at low tide you can see four parallel rows of posts stretching out to sea beyond the low water mark.

The northernmost pair, furthest from the Queen's Pier, are of an old landing stage which was derelict before the first Ordnance Survey maps of 1867 were compiled, because they refer to these posts as 'Old Landing Stage, washed away'. The two other longer lines of posts closest to the Queen's Pier are marked on that map 'New Landing Stage' and are shown running from



Location of the jetty showing it in use (adapted from OS 1867)



Four rows of landing stage supports

closely adjacent to the promenade (then called Shore Road) out seawards to almost half the length of the current pier – over 1,100 ft (338 metres).

Today's widened promenade means the original end to the 'new landing stage' is lost below it.

If you walk out across the beach to these landing stage leg remnants at low tide you can see the older set have been roughly broken down by the

tides, whereas the younger set are cleanly cut, indicating that probably when the Queen's Pier was opened and they were then made entirely surplus to requirements, the longer landing stage was deliberately removed rather than simply being allowed to be broken down and washed away by the waves.

In most civilised counties where such important visual remains of past heritage ex-

ist, they are highlighted and if threatened by burgeoning development, effective and robust steps are taken to protect them. Only recently a television programme on a multi-million pound development along the banks of the Thames showed that the scheme was amended to carefully and considerably step clearly around the remains of just three wooden posts visible in the river at low tide that were once part of an ancient fish trap.

The proposed marina, or more so the landward area described as 'boat club', will completely destroy Ramsey's last vestiges of the low water landing stages that were once used by those coming to or leaving the town when the tides prevented access to the inner harbour area.

Despite the strong inshore gales which many will recall regularly flooding the streets

of South Ramsey each winter, these precious ancient links to the outside world have survived and are still in place.

Rather than simply allowing these fragile remaining fragments of Ramsey's rich marine heritage to be bulldozed or grubbed up and lost for ever, it is not beyond the capabilities of marine and civil engineering to preserve them and turn them into a heritage feature which could be exploited by the proposed development.

There should also be a formal archaeological investigation into their construction which should include dendro-chronological dating of both sets, followed by removal and preservation of a significant set of samples, some of which may be cur-

rently below the surface. This involves taking a core sample through the wood, and examining the growth rings seen through the timber.

Their thicknesses and sequence are compared with known tree growth rates seen in the island and elsewhere in order to establish the likely dates for their original construction.

Ramsey also possesses a third precious maritime heritage feature – this is immediately adjacent to the northern side of the Queen's Pier – the remnants of the old stone-built landing jetty which was in common use in 1867, but by 1881 when the Queen's Pier was being designed, had fallen into partial disuse and was labelled 'Old Jetty' on the pier plans.

Like the landing stage leg stumps, little remains of this jetty. If you look at the gradient



Historic view north from Queen's Pier - stone jetty in immediate foreground, with landing stage behind in middle distance (iMuseum, part of MNH PG/9932)



View of the Old Jetty from Queen's Pier c2016

remaining immediately below the modern promenade walkway, you can see how much the modern promenade has been built up since the 1860s.

The modern Queen's Pier Road was called Ballastole Road on one map in the 1860's, then became Goldie Road by 1881 before adopting its modern allocation.

It runs directly onto the end of the jetty. This was also immediately along the side of a house called Peru Cottage, which once sat slap-bang in the middle of what is now the modern road junction outside the modern Queen's Pier entrance building!

That indicates the jetty (or its predecessor if there was one) might be far older than any of the timber landing stages to the north might reveal, and this was a very old route to access the shoreline south of Ramsey town, it being probably the closest practical point to gain access to the beach from the road running north from Ballure into Ramsey.

Retaining this special maritime feature from Ramsey's heritage will show future generations many things about the changes which have occurred in this area of the town, and also ensure that the resto-



Location of the landing stages and old jetty (adapted from PRO A41/816)

ration of the Queen's Pier will present the perfect viewing platform to look down onto it for those future tourists and interested locals.

You might well think the jetty has long been disused, it's virtually inaccessible now except if you walk over to it from the beach, and no-one will be really affected by its loss.

The same could be said for the Tower of Refuge in Douglas Bay. Thankfully no-one has dared suggest that disappears just for the sake of convenience to a commercial redevelopment such as a cruise-liner berth. Ramsey's marine heritage is precious

– it needs to be understood and valued in order for it to be retained. Hopefully this will now come to the fore and not be bulldozed away.

WIDER HERITAGE CONSIDERATIONS

The proposed development will forever remove any sight or enjoyment of the sea for all of those residents living between the Queen's Pier and the Catholic Church – extensive building and yacht club developments will make their properties well over 100 metres from the new water's edge. The development will take away the entire accessible



The clean-cut stumps of the newer stage, looking back to Marine Gardens



Queen's Pier and the landing stage remnants

beach in that area from public enjoyment – an expanse of over 30 acres at normal low tide. The optimistically named 'park' on the plans overlooks the problem that trees will not grow a few hundred yards further north so are unlikely to thrive here either.

Salt spray will also have a detrimental effect on the selection, quality and durability of any grass planted.

The vistas enjoyed since 1886 of the Queen's Pier from the harbour South Pier and the sun rising over Maughold Head through the legs of the pier will be lost for ever.

The lifeboat station appears to be 100m further from the sea with no direct access to it – creating potentially life threatening delays which must not be allowed to jeopardise the operation of this vital and also ancient facility.

There are many other aspects of the potential impact of the proposed development which jeopardise the surrounding marine heritage assets of Ramsey. These include

the proximity and safety of the navigational route to and from it to a fully restored and potentially operational replacement berthing head on a fully restored Queen's Pier.

The proximity of the proposed rock armour revetment is of key concern and the risk of reflected waves back onto the pier legs in storm conditions is a concern as such reflections can have accumulative effects when coincident with incoming storm waves impacting from the opposite direction.

The Queen's Pier was not designed to withstand impinging storm waves like this from two simultaneous opposing directions. The deep beach excavations required to create the slipway and wave screen running parallel to the pier less than 40m away from it may destabilise the Queen's Pier screw-piled legs, which have been stable in the lower clay layer since 1886. Wave action around the pier resulting from these changes to an oth-

erwise open beach will also require careful and very detailed analysis – a clearance equal to 10 times the pier width might be called for to ensure the pier's long term stability is not compromised, rather than the two to three times width clearance currently indicated.

A comparison can be made with marinas like that in Poole in Dorset, which when new in the 1980's experienced serious beach pollution from vessels dumping their sewage as they entered or departed the facility.

The risk of such pollution to the Queen's Pier, landing stages and jetty described here might be minimal but the impact on the remaining beaches north and south of Queen's Pier or the suggested scallop beds within the development must not be overlooked and effective controls and fines must be rigorously enforced should it ever be constructed.

• A public meeting about the marina plans takes place at the Mountain View Innovation Centre, in Jurby Road, tomorrow (Wednesday).