

BUILDINGS AT RISK

The expanding community of the village of Onchan

In this edition of *Buildings at Risk*, Keren Corkill, of the Friends of Onchan's Heritage, continues her look at the heart of Onchan – and tells of the role The Butt's buildings played in the community and their lives.

Kiondroghad was last mentioned in the 1841 census, and since then and over time the name of the Parish has changed from Kirk Onchan, to Conchan, and now to Onchan – through all of which The Butt has remained at the heart of the village.

In 1841 it was decided that a dedicated infants' school should be provided, and monies were raised as a result of special sermons. Built in 1842, it – and the Vicarage, built the same year – were designed by Webbe, former partner of John Welch who designed St Peter's Church. Now named confusingly Welch House, the former infants' school has a church-like appearance with the head of St Peter above the door.

Following the success of the infants' school, in 1845 work began to upgrade provision for the older children.

The vicar and wardens raised money from the sale of the old parochial school in the village, and a new parochial school, incorporating schoolmaster's accommodation, was opened in 1846.

With its back to The Butt, the new parochial school faced towards what later became Royal Avenue. This is now the site of Haydn Minny's Garage.

By 1860 the new parochial school had to spread into the schoolmaster's rooms, so a house for the schoolmaster, still called The Rowans, was built. The path past the parochial school up to Royal Avenue became known as Schoolmaster's Lane.

Already under pressure as the population of the vil-



Former infants school built 1842, designed by Webbe but now named Welch House

lage grew, the premises were further stretched when the 1872 Education Act brought schooling under centralised government control (previously schools had largely been church-run).

There were a few heated discussions involving Parson Howard and the school board.

Parson Howard was

against state education saying that it was an "imperinent interference" in the religious education of children attending the parochial school. His objections to it were forcefully argued and included a physical attack on the then chairman of the School Board, Mr Cadman. Nonetheless, his objections were ignored and the new Onchan board school in School Road was opened in 1876.

To celebrate Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1897, five street lights were erected at key locations/junctions in Onchan (none of them in The Butt), for which the Isle of Man Tramways and Electric Power Company offered to supply free electricity 'in perpetuity'.

When that company went bankrupt in 1901, Onchan went dark.

The successor MER company declined to honour any



Molly Corrooin's cottage in 2019

commitments to supply power to the Onchan streetlights so in 1904 one had a gas-lamp hung from it.

Once 20th-century street lighting reached Onchan, the five Jubilee light pillars were redundant and found other uses as vent pipes etc.

In 1986, for Heritage Year, the Jubilee lights were salvaged/restored, painted in the cream and maroon col-

our scheme of the original Isle of Man Tramways and Electric Power Company, and erected along The Butt.

The two small buildings at the top of the Butt now used by the Department of Infrastructure were Faragher's smithy, one of several in Onchan.

After the smithy closed, they became a wheelwright's/joiner's workshop.

Next to these buildings on the corner was a post office owned by John Lewin.

Tragically one of his children was killed while investigating the contents of a biscuit tin hidden under a bed – it contained dynamite.

A property on the opposite corner at one time housed the Lancashire and Yorkshire Bank – the first bank to open in Onchan. Latterly known as Kenyon's Cafe, it was bought for the youth of Onchan by Peter Karran; but has now been sold by the Commissioners and is undergoing careful renovation.

A modern terrace of neo-Georgian houses now occupies the site where a terrace of three houses stood; built in the 19th century they were demolished in 1979 because of subsidence of the back walls of the properties due to the stream which ran under them on its way to Royal Avenue.

Although in Royal Avenue, the Parish Hall is visible from The Butt, and accessed from The Butt via Schoolmaster's Lane.

A stunning example of Arts and Crafts architecture, its designer was the now much admired architect Mackay Hugh Baillie Scott (23/10/1865 - 10/02/1945).

He was part of the Arts and Crafts Movement and during the 12 years in which he lived in the Isle of Man developed his own unique style, including designing The Red House in which he lived.

The growing population of Onchan had need of a village hall in which to hold meetings and to accommodate the children of St Peter's Church Sunday School.

Again it was through public subscription with money raised from various events which made it possible.

Stylish inside and out, the striking interior displays beautiful heart shaped stained glass windows and roof timbers painted black set against white panels.

It was opened on the November 22, 1898 and remains an important building today being in great demand as a venue for a wide range of activities.

In addition, it is fitting that it is here that the Friends of Onchan's Heritage



Annie (aka Molly) Corrooin and daughter Florence c 1910



The Butt with the thatched cottage (former weaving shed)



The Butt after the cottage was re-roofed in slate in 1900



Jubilee street light, now in The Butt

hold talks and meetings.

Opposite Church Road, and in line with St Peter's Church, the Onchan war memorial was unveiled in November 1924 by Mr and Mrs Broadbent who suffered the loss of three sons during the Great War.

It was designed by Archibald Knox and carved by Thomas Quayle. When the Main Road was widened in 1982 it was moved to its present position underneath the Weeping Elm.

Approaching the dip in The Butt on the left hand side sits a cottage, said to be the oldest building in Onchan.

In the late 1700s it belonged to the Crow family and was referred to as 'my little house'. They were weavers and this cottage was originally a weaver's shed, but at some point it was converted into a dwelling, with a chimney stack which was built outside the cottage and is not part of the chioillagh (fireplace or inglenook) as was usual.

This cottage became, from the early 1880s, the rented home of Molly Corrooin for nearly 30 years.

In 1900, the cottage was condemned for human habitation because of its failed thatched roof and damp floor, and the landlord had it re-roofed in slate.

On the gable of the cottage the bwid sugganes (thatch

tie-stones) can still be seen along with the roof shape of the original building.

Situated near the bottom of The Butt it has become iconic and is often photographed and painted, providing a scenic landscape for artists.

In 1970 it was left to the Commissioners by the Skillicorn sisters, 'to be kept as an example of a 19th century cottage'.

On May 11986, as part of the Heritage Year celebrations, Molly Corrooin's was opened by the recently formed Onchan Heritage Committee (now Friends of Onchan's Heritage) as an example of 19th century living.

From this time it has been manned, and the interior cared for, by members of The Friends of Onchan's Heritage.

However, it remains the responsibility of the Onchan District Commissioners to maintain the fabric of this historical asset for now and future generations.

Recent research has revealed a startling and revelatory story of the life of Annie. Molly, it turns out, was an affectionate name as she was christened Annie Quilliam in 1845.

Her story tells of an austere existence, relying on the

vicar and wardens of the Parish for her upkeep in difficult times. Widowed in 1879, she eked out a living with seven of her children, whilst the eldest was cared for by her father and sister. Mention is made of Parson Howard's intervention when she and her children were reported for begging. He wasn't too pleased as he had promised to look after the bereaved family at her husband's graveside.

He felt aggrieved that people would think otherwise and wrote to the newspapers.

Annie Corrooin was very able to voice her opinion too, and strongly denied that she or her children had been begging, although witnesses said otherwise. It was Parson Howard who suggested she take in washing to help provide for her family.

No doubt feeling she had enough to do with looking after her young children, she said she would take in some plain sewing. Nonetheless Parson Howard was highly respected in the parish and showed sincere concern for the plight of the poor.

It is a sad reflection of the times that in the three years 1883-5 three of Annie's children died, the youngest being only six, Sabrina (who had been named after the vicar's wife), John Joseph and Lily Madelina.

Her other children were Thomas, Robert Walter, Harriet and Florence. The 1911 census shows that Annie had remained in the cottage with her daughter Florence and was referred to as a 'laundress'.

The washing can be seen in photographs drying out on the opposite hedge. And so it was that in 1912 Annie received news that she had been left a legacy by her brother, long emigrated to Bell County in Texas.

He left a substantial sum in his will to 'my beloved sister Annie Corrooin'. Although this windfall enabled Annie to move to and pay the rent for a new home in St Catherine's Terrace, alas her good fortune was short lived; she died in 1914.

However, she had enough time to make her will and have a memorial headstone erected, prominently, in the churchyard.

Poignantly, Annie had the names of her husband and daughter Sabrina engraved but the next name was hers.

It appears that it was her intention to add the names of her other deceased children who had been buried in the old churchyard and unmarked.

The Butt is a legacy to the beginnings of the Onchan we see today.



Parson Howard

(Manx Museum)

The buildings which remain tell us so much about those who have lived, worked and died throughout the centuries.

Molly Corrooin's Cottage is of particular interest and at the most risk due to its

great age. Visitors to the cottage are always so pleased to see that this little dwelling is still very much as it was, giving an insight and a feeling of awe at the way in which the ordinary people of times long past had lived.



The Old Vicarage built 1842 but now a private residence



Onchan parish hall's striking interior



Onchan parish hall from The Butt by D Maddrell (courtesy Mrs J Loader)