

BUILDINGS AT RISK

Harcroft and Springfield – not even shadows left now

In this week's *Buildings at Risk*, Susan Temple continues her look at the group of fine grand houses which once stood on an historic estate on the outskirts of Douglas.

The start of the 19th century saw significant improvements in both agriculture and housebuilding on the Isle of Man.

John Christian Curwen of Ewanrigg and Milntown was not only variously both an MP and an MHK, but also a passionate campaigner to improve agricultural productivity across the British Isles, for which work he was awarded a Gold Medal by the Royal Society for the Advancement of the Arts, Commerce and Manufactures.

At the same time, Manx architecture was also increasingly influenced by imported styles and architects, notable in the sophisticated 'town mansions' that were erected on the outskirts of Douglas as it expanded exponentially.

In the first half of the 19th century, a number of imposing Regency Villas were built in the parish of Braddan about two miles from Douglas. Two of the houses, Springfield and Ballaughton, were additional/replacement mansions, but Harcroft was the first grand/mansion house on the land.

These houses were built (for the most part) for people of a certain style from outside the island who flocked there at that time.

In 1805, Captain Thomas Harrison bought the remainder of the Curleod Ballaughton Estate for £5,000 (see *Buildings at Risk* on Ballaughton in the Isle of Man Examiner of June 12, 2018).

The estate was divided, and two large houses –



Harcroft, pictured on an MEA greetings card

Harcroft and Springfield – were built on part of the land within the next 25 years.

It was at this point that the farmland was divorced from the houses, leaving about

three and one half acres at Springfield, and five and one half acres at Harcroft.

In 1811 there is an advertisement for the farm at Springfield by Mr Mark Cosnahan, the existing tenant, for 156 acres to be let for the remainder of a lease of 19 years, which would date from the time that Mr Harrison purchased the land (it is uncertain how this fitted with later Springfield House, and if these lands were part of the adjoining Anagh Coar).

In 1703 Bishop Wilson was instrumental in bringing to an end the long running dispute over the 'land question'.

Three representatives of the House of Keys met representatives of the then Earl of Derby, and an agreement was

reached whereby the land rents were doubled and then fixed in perpetuity.

This lasted until 1916 when the Manx landholders bought the then Crown Rights. It gave farmers an incentive to improve the land and build better farmhouses and farmyard; reinforced by the ideas of John Christian Curwen et al.

In the 1811 advertisement for the farm at Springfield you can see that a tremendous effort had been put into modernising the buildings and improving the land by importing dung and also lime.

Springfield Farm also had a 'Capital threshing machine worked by water'.

Sadly none of these glo-

ries were passed on to the owners of the 'new' Springfield when it was built in the early half of the 19th century.

SPRINGFIELD

Springfield was the smallest of the three villas. Even so it had a lodge, six bedrooms, nurseries, stables, and outbuildings, the whole surrounded by lawns, and flower beds.

There was a vegetable garden, and woodland.

The approach was down a wooded drive. The whole was stuccoed and painted with a large bay at the gable end of the house.

In this respect it resembled the other two houses, Harcroft and Ballaughton, and also other villas built nearer to Douglas on Belmont Hill.

An early owner of Springfield was Mr Alfred Walter Adams, advocate, a shareholder in Dumbell's Bank.

When his wife died in 1878, he sold the house and all its contents in a four-day sale which included 'an Open Victoria Phaeton, a game cart, a set of new silver-mounted harness, oil paintings, Brussels carpets, an old Japanese cabinet and very old and valuable china together with very superior mahogany bedsteads, marble washstands, feather beds, table linen, etc.'

The next occupant was Mr Lewis Llewellyn Vulliany, a widower, of private means, with a young daughter.

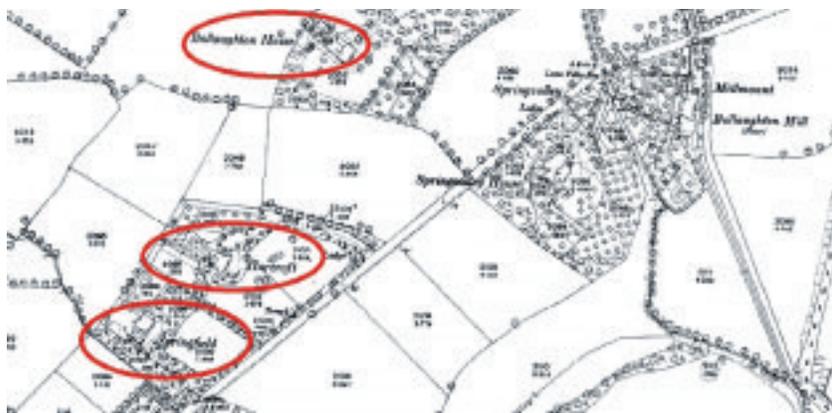
He paid £2,000 for the house, shortly afterwards remarried and had several other children, including a pair of twins, all born at Springfield.

Mr Vulliany was a church warden of Braddan Church, and very involved in raising money for the church tower.

His wife joined the other ladies in the area raising money for good causes, including housing for Gentlewomen in Reduced Circumstances.

The Vullianys lived at Springfield until they left the island in 1898.

Mr William Brearey, a retired chemist, bought Springfield in 1898, and moved into it with his wife and small family. Ill-luck dogged them, a daughter was born at Springfield in 1900



The ESTATE of SPRINGFIELD, near DOUGLAS.
To be LET, and immediate Possession given; or (as will be preferred) an unexpired Term of 19 Years, from Hollintide, 1810, will be Sold.—The said Estate being beautifully and conveniently situated, and very greatly improved with a vast Quantity of Manure and Lime, as will appear upon Inspection; upwards of 30 Acres being laid down last Year, and 12 more this Year, Limed and Dunged, under Rye Grass and Clover. The Whole perfectly Drained, and the Water conveyed so as to supply each Field; contains upwards of 156 Acres, to which will be added, two excellent Meadows adjoining.—The said Estate is capable of being divided into 3 Parts, (if more agreeable) having capital Mansion House, Gardens, &c.; also Four other Dwelling Houses and Offices, for 9 Horses and 30 Head of Cattle; together with a capital Threshing Machine, worked by Water.
N. B. To an approved Person disposed to take the Whole, every liberal Advantage will be afforded; very large Cornposts (independent of Farm Yard Dung) being laid out this Year, and now under Wheat and Barley:—the Lands, as at present under Wheat, Barley, Oats, Peas, Potatoes, Turnips, and Hay, to be taken at a reasonable Valuation.—Also may be had, the Horses, Cattle, Sheep, &c. &c. &c.
 Proposals, by Private Contract, will be received before the 1st Day of August, 1811, otherwise the said Estate will be either Let, or Lease Sold, in the most eligible Manner, by Public Auction, upon the Premises, at 11 o’Clock in the Forenoon, on **TUESDAY the 20th Day of August, 1811.**
 Application may be made to **Mr. MARK COSMAHAN** at Springfield, who has a remarkable fine Stallion, rising 4 Years old to dispose of, and a few Cows ready to Calve.
Springfield, April 23, 1811. [17]

Springfield Farm particulars - 1811

(iMuseum)



Harcroft at the end

(photo: Peter Kelly)

who died the same day, and in 1904 Mr Brearey himself died after apparently fainting, falling forward, and catching his neck on the edge of a wooden bucket half filled with broken crocks and so that he could not breathe.

He was found by his coachman, Stanley Boyde, and the family doctor pronounced him dead from suffocation when he arrived.

Mrs Brearey (pictured right) continued to live at Springfield, and there is a note in the newspaper of August 12 1916, saying that her son, Lieutenant Brearey, East Sussex Regiment, had arrived home on sick leave.

She was a benefactress of the scheme to provide reading materials for soldiers at the front, and also to the organisation set up to assist

wounded soldiers, and widows of soldiers.

The 1920s saw the arrival of William Kirkpatrick and his family from Boyle in Co. Roscommon.

Sadly in May 1943 he received a telegram from the India Office to say that his elder son, Lieutenant William George Kirkpatrick, Gurkha Rifles, was missing, believed killed in action.

William Kirkpatrick senior lived at Springfield until he died in June 1951.

Springfield was sold again in 1954 to Mrs Jean Burrell, the sister of Sir James

Martin, who, together with her son, came to the island to start the Ronaldsway Aircraft Company.

Mrs Burrell stayed until 1977 when she bought Balladoole where she lived until



ISLE OF MAN
SPRINGFIELD HOUSE, BRADDAN
The only free Douglas town centre. Excellent transport right into

GENTLEMEN'S COUNTRY RESIDENCE OF QUALITY AND CHARACTER
 enjoying a secluded position in 32 acres mature wooded grounds of over 5½ acres in extent



Approached by a long tree-lined driveway:
 Entrance porch, reception hall, 42ft. drawing room, sun lounge, dining room, morning room, butler's pantry, kitchen, modern fitted kitchen, breakfast room, 4 bedrooms (3 with en-suite) on site, 2 with walk-in wardrobes, further bedrooms, wine cellar.

60 foot gravel parking.
 Overlaid with extensive range of auxiliary buildings including a 2 car garage.

Staff Apartments: Hall, sitting room, kitchen, 2 bedrooms, bathroom. Fitted heating.

Gate Lodge: Hall, lounge, kitchen, 2 bedrooms, bathroom.
 Ground heating.

Mature wooded grounds include a small Glen, greenhouse and kitchen garden.

Over 5½ ACRES in all.
FOR SALE FREEHOLD

Apply: **CRYSTAL BROTHERS, STOTT & KERRISH**, Chartered Surveyors, Auctioneers and Estate Agents.
 Offices in Ramsey, Douglas and Port Erin.
 Please apply to: Douglas Office, Exchange House, Albert Street, Douglas, Isle of Man. Tel. 0524 23778

Springfield – still a Gentleman's Residence in 1977



The Bridson family on the steps at Harcroft

she died. The decline of the house started at this point.

It was at one time or another a nursing home and a country club, before being purchased by the Government in 1992.

The land was joined to that of Harcroft, and first-time buyer homes were built on the combined land in 2000.

HARCROFT

According to the 1851 Census, a George Wallace, late Captain 16th Foot, with his wife Charlotte and four year old daughter, lived at Harcroft; together with his father, a niece and five indoor servants including a footman, nurse and cook.

The coachman and gardener lived 'out'.

Harcroft was bought in 1859 for £1,850 by Mr Beckwith, father of the Advocate Charles Beckwith, and Grandfather of Lieutenant Beckwith RN who was one of the promoters of Foxdale and other mining companies on the island. The house was described

as 'being of two stories and constructed of the best', with French windows opening on to an extensive lawn, and well-wooded on its borders.

There is a lodge at the entrance gates (South Lodge, the only part of the property still standing today), a further cottage, stables, loose box, harness room, double coach-house, tool house all lofted over and a piggyery.

"Two productive gardens well stocked with the choicest fruit trees and forcing pits,

greenhouses and a vinery.'

After the death of Mr Beckwith in 1872, the house was acquired by Mr Thomas Fleming, a master butcher, who lived there with his wife and children, before returning to live in Douglas.

One of his sons was sworn in as a Member of the Manx Bar in 1888, and three of his four sisters married into prominent Manx families, whose descendants include David Cannan, Qualtroughs and Backwells, and their de-



Bridson children with 'Prince', the hurdy-gurdy man's pony

scendants include Admiral Huggill one of whose family, Sarah Huggill married Andrew Lloyd Webber, the composer.

The house was next purchased by Mr TJ Bridson, a man of means, who lived there with his wife Hilda and four children.

He also had a boarding house at Fort William on Douglas Head.

Mrs Bridson died in 1909, much lamented. Her funeral was described as 'very impressive; and her coffin was driven to the church by the family coachman, Mr Clarke.

Mr Bridson lived a long and trouble-free life, and, it is said that in old age, he still climbed Snaefell each year.

One of his sons, Gerald was an unusual man for his age. He was elected as a Member of the House of Keys in 1919, aged 26, as a member of the Manx Labour Party and again 18 years later.

He and his wife, the former headmistress of St Mark's School, were both ex-Presidents of the Manx Labour Party, which led to him being described as a 'traitor to his class'.

He also drove a van for the Manx Co-operative Society. During the First World War he served as a soldier and volunteered for service in the Second World War but was discharged by age after two years' service in the King's Regiment.

He apparently had a flaming beard until he joined the Army and used to say that he carried the Red Flag on his face.

He was also a winner of the Parish Walk.

Sadly his brother Ronald was killed in action in August 1918.

His sister, Beryl Bridson, was very involved with the Girl Guide and Scouting movement. She ran the 1st Kewaigue Scouts during the Great War and for long afterwards, and helped with the 1st Braddan Wolf Cubs in the Second World War. She died in 1983.

After the death of Mr Bridson in 1946, Harcroft was sold twice in quick succession. The first time, for £6,200 to the trustees appointed under the will of the late Mr Thomas Cubbon JP for the purpose of using it as a convalescent home, for residents of the island; and then again three months later in April 1947, to the Manx Electricity Board.

It remained in use as offices and electrical equipment showroom until approximately 1990 when the land was joined with that of Springfield, and ultimately first-time buyer houses were built in 2000.

These are the type of properties that are vulnerable. Harcroft and Springfield have gone; Ballaughton was to have been saved but was failed by the system - 3, 2, 1, ZERO.