

BUILDINGS AT RISK

The Falcon's Nest: historic village landmark since 1861

Our Buildings at Risk series covers buildings and structures – at risk, lost, and saved. This week Doreen Moule, of Rushen Heritage Trust, takes a look at an iconic Port Erin building: its history, and how the village port's sole-remaining large hotel still plays a vital role in the community.

The Falcon's Nest in Port Erin is an iconic building. There has been an inn on or near to this site since at least 1837, when the White Lion was described as being 'comfortable' and 'the only inn in Port Erin', and whose landlord, Patrick Cringle, was a 'keeper of Post horses'.

By 1843, it had been re-named the 'Queen's Arms' and James Clugston was the landlord. In 1851 his wife, Ann, is recorded as being the landlady. The name 'Queen's Arms' was retained until 1858, when it became 'The Falcon's Nest'.

In 1861, paid for and on land owned by William Milner, 'The Port Erin Castle Hotel' was built on the current site, with its now famous castellated roof.

The following year Ann Clugston was in charge of both The Falcon's Nest Hotel and The Port Erin Castle Hotel. In 1861, she set up a partnership with John Geary of Manchester, her son-in-law and by 1863 he was in charge of the 'Falcon's Nest and Castle Hotel'.

An advert for the hotel in 1863, tells us that there were 32 rooms, including four dining rooms, a substantial hotel for the time, and outlines the wonderful location: 'the finest sea bathing in Mona's clearest waters, fishing, shooting, 12 Chasms, Druidical remains [the Meayll Circle], and a short walk to the Parish Church'.

In 1869, Ann Clugston and John Geary took out a mortgage for £2,000 and purchased The Falcon's Nest and part of the Quarterland of



The Falcon's Nest in Port Erin

Rowany from William Milner and his wife, Jane. In 1873, Ann Clugston, with a further £1,000 mortgage, bought a further parcel of land, together with house, cottage, stables, warehouse, yard and premises near to the Falcon's Nest from William Milner.

In 1874 both William Milner and John Geary died. The latter had left goods in his will to his sister, Mary, and, as he and Ann Clugston had jointly bought the Falcon's Nest in 1869, the property had to be sold to realise his share.

As a result, Ann sold the Falcon's Nest by auction, together with land, stables etc. on June 2 1876, to George Trustrum, a licensed victualler from Peel, for £3,880.

After George Trustrum died in November 1878, his wife, Ellen (née Kissack) and their son, George Lucas Trustrum, ran the Falcon's Nest until Ellen's death in 1883.

George Lucas Trustrum continued to run the hotel, and had it extended at least twice towards the railway station, as can be seen by the architecture. The original part has the castellated roofline.

By 1894, The Falcon's Nest reportedly had 60 bedrooms and guests had access to tennis facilities. An earlier advertisement stated that there was

a 'magnificent billiard table' and placed emphasis on the improvements to the infrastructure in Port Erin.

In 1898 a syndicate, consisting of JA Brown, CS Nelson and JD Rogers (of Dumbell's Bank), was formed to amalgamate many of the Island's hotels and breweries.

John Archibald Brown, the proprietor of the Isle of Man Times, held the main financial share; it is possible that Allsopp's Brewery of Burton-on-Trent was also an investor.

In 1899, George Lucas Trustrum and his wife, Emily, sold both the Falcon's Nest and The Eagle to JA Brown. Later that year, Brown sold these two hotels plus 27 others, including the Belle Vue, Port Erin and the Port Erin Station Hotel, two breweries, some shops and plots of land to Isle of Man Breweries for £500,000.

In 1899 the Isle of Man Breweries company was floated on the Stock Exchange; Boddington's of Manchester held a £20,000 interest, how-



Safe maker William Milner, was responsible for the building of The Port Erin Castle Hotel – now The Falcon's Nest – in 1861 (Manx National Heritage)

ever, they withdrew from the island before the First World War.

How the Port Erin hotels fared during this difficult period is not clear, but it is reported by Tim Crumpling and Roger Rawcliffe that Boddington's neglected 'their sanitary defects', a state that continued into 1911.

In the same book it states that Mannington's Brewery

was part of a group responsible for the Belle Vue, The Eagle and The Falcon's Nest.

In 1917 Joseph and Mary Swinnerton were landlord and landlady when their son, Private Frederick William Swinnerton, was killed in action, aged 19, on June 7 1917 at Ypres.

Their daughter, 'Jo', who became manageress in 1924 and remained until she was



Hildegard Fischer, a doctor, interned at the Falcon's Nest (Manx National Heritage)

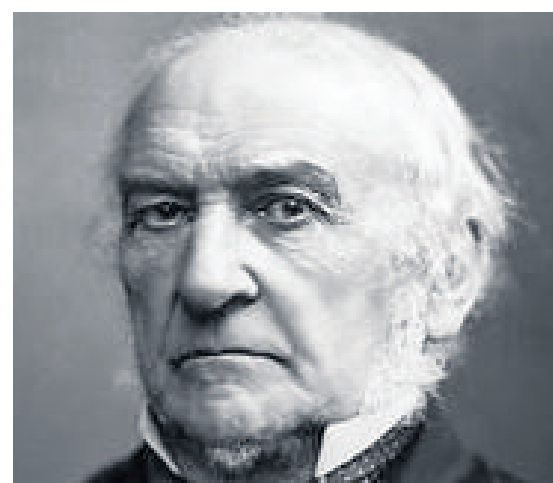
PORT ERIN.
THE "FALCON'S NEST,"
 Built upon the Margin of the Splendid Bay.
 IN this first-class HOTEL, so liberally patronized, replete in every Department, may be found Home Comforts, well-aired Beds, and economical charges. The oldest and best-conducted HOTEL in the South of the Island. Close by the Railway Station.
 Table d'Hôte at 2 o'clock. Cars and Boats for Hire as usual.
 A NEW AMERICAN BOWLING SALOON.
GEORGE TRUSTRUM, Proprietor.

PORT ERIN.
"THE FALCON'S NEST."
 BUILT UPON THE MARGIN OF THE BEAUTIFUL BAY.
 THIS first class HOTEL, so liberally patronised, is complete in every department. It adjoins the Port Erin terminus of the Isle of Man Railway Company, and overlooks the picturesque Bay. The Hotel is the best conducted and largest out of Douglas. For Families there is every convenience, and special care is taken to administer in every way to their comforts. BATHING VANS. ROOMY BOATS. Excursions to the Calf Island, and other interesting places in the neighbourhood. Hot and Cold, Fresh and Salt Water BATHS.
 During the past winter, a large addition has been made to the House, which is now THE MOST COMMODIOUS OUT OF DOUGLAS. A large Room capable of seating 400 Persons, has been added, suitable for School and Pic-Nic Parties, Club Dinners, &c.
 BILLIARDS.—A magnificent billiard Room, with a splendid Table.
 Table d'Hôte Daily, at halfpast One and Six o'clock. Saddle Horses and Conveyances on Hire.
GEORGE L. TRUSTRUM, Proprietor.

Advertising attractions and innovation under two generations of proprietor – 'American Bowling Saloon' 1877 and '400 seat room' 1889 (iMuseum)



Falcon Villa



British politician William Ewart Gladstone stayed at the Falcon's Nest on a walking holiday in the island (courtesy of www.biography.com)

62, gave this account of her experience in the Second World War of the internees billeted at the hotel when it was part of the Women's Rushen Internment Camp: 'During the Second World War Port Erin was turned into a camp for internees with barbed wire all round and I had 90 women at the Falcon. German, Austrian, Italian and all sorts: it is really surprising what one can do if one has to.'

'Every hotel and boarding house in Port Erin was full of women and there was a Commandant from Scotland Yard in charge of the lot, and we could go to him if in trouble, but once I'd got things organised I was alright.'

The women interned were mainly German and Austrian refugees – cooks, a housemaid, a hairdresser and a doctor.

Since the early 1980s, the

hotel has been run by Bob and Loreto Potts. They have been instrumental in sustaining the Falcon's Nest when most of the other hotels have disappeared.

SIGNIFICANT PEOPLE

William Milner was the owner of the land and responsible for the building, in 1861, of The Port Erin Castle Hotel (The Falcon's Nest as we know it). He was a wealthy safe manufacturer from Liverpool who came to the island after an illness and gradually spent more and more time here to recuperate finally retiring to Port Erin where he owned land. His house, 'The Rest', was built on the land where Erinville currently stands.

In 1855 his idea for the breakwater began to take shape. The plan was to create an anchorage and shelter for 1,000 sailing vessels.

The work was responsible for the creation of The Port Erin breakwater railway and the use of the first steam locomotive in the island. Unfortunately, the work was destroyed by storms in 1894 and can now only be seen at low tide.

The local people, in recognition of his generosity, erected Milner's Tower on Bradda Head in 1871, three years before he died. One of the function rooms at The Falcon's Nest – where guests currently eat breakfast – is called the 'Milner Suite' in his honour and was the beautiful Victorian ballroom.

William Ewart Gladstone, British statesman and politician, stayed at the Falcon's Nest during a walking holiday on the island. Mr Gladstone, in his diary, described the hotel as 'a nice homely place'.

The remarkable former

landlady, Ann Clugston, having retired by this time to the Falcon's Nest, died in August 1896, but not before she had written to the Right Honourable William Gladstone to congratulate him on his birthday, December 29 1895 and to remind him of his stay at the Falcon's Nest.

The Trustrum family, George Trustrum and his son, George Lucas Trustrum, played an equally important role in the history and development of the Falcon's Nest from 1876 to 1899.

George Lucas Trustrum's son, the late Brian Trustrum, also made a considerable contribution to the life, heritage and community of Port Erin.

The current 'Falons' function room was, until recently, called 'The Trustrum Suite'.

THE PRESENT

At the current time, the Falcon's Nest is in 'limbo' as it awaits plans for alterations. Is it going to go the way of the other hotels on Port Erin Promenade? Or will its importance as a hotel, and the heritage spirit of the building, be retained?

There are no other hotels of any size in Port Erin which will be able to accommodate the considerable number of visitors we still welcome during race periods. In addition, there are other prestigious events which take place during the year at the Erin Arts Centre when the participants/competitors require nearby accommodation. There are

also many people visiting the island who do not want to stay in Douglas and prefer somewhere quieter. Without this regularly changing clientele, the local businesses will lose valuable income.

For islanders, the hotel also provides an excellent eating place and a well-used function room for weddings, parties, talks, meetings, exhibitions and other events. It is central to the village and a major part of local life.

This property is in itself a heritage site and should be preserved. There are many people on the island who, it seems, would be delighted to erase the past in favour of more concrete boxes of various sizes and colours. Will they still exist in 160-plus years? Unlikely!

Whilst some visitors come for the races, others come for the heritage and the beauty of the island. Many of them have little or no heritage in their own countries and many of them live in places where the beauty has been destroyed and replaced with modern structures. We need to make more of our heritage and attract visitors who will stay a while, appreciate it and spend money here.

It is understandable that facilities in hotels need updat-

ing to satisfy the high expectations of today's tourists, but surely that can be done without losing the integrity of the historic buildings.

Those properties which are of historical interest could make a feature of any areas/aspects of the building which are unusual or special in any way. Instead of granting planning permission willy-nilly for insensitive developments, why does the government not give grants towards plans which encourage the conservation of outstanding features/buildings?

The Area Plan for The South, approved by Tynwald in January 2013, identified the Falcon's Nest for potential registration, and placed it in the heart of a proposed Conservation Area – none of which has been progressed.

The Falcon's Nest is an iconic building in the south of the island and needs to be protected from the fate of so many others. To this end it should be added to the Protected Buildings Register, so that its development can be sensitively thought out for the mutual benefit of the owners, the local users, the visitors and the wider community.

The Falcon's Nest Hotel – the first, and last, large hotel in Port Erin.



The Falcon's Nest, William Milner's house ('The Rest') and St Catherine's Church (iMuseum)