

## BUILDINGS AT RISK

# Will Covid-19 call time on some of the island's pubs?

*Patricia Newton of the Isle of Man Natural History and Antiquarian Society delves into the history of the island's pubs and speculates on the possible future of some drinking establishments in the wake of Covid-19.*

**R**est and be thankful or just have a drink of ale – often safer than the 'drinking' water available in early days even for the kids.

Maybe just the front room of a house, at a point to change the horses, crossroads with a smiddy to re-shoe a horse, the last point on a route to which the post was delivered.

Maybe just close to a safe haven for grateful returning fishing crews (Niarbyl had 11 ale houses!) for those involved in the running trade or halfway between two settlements, the ale house/pub/tavern/inn or hotel is hugely significant in community life.

While licences to sell ale

were required from 1597 and public house licences from 1609, such were the numbers that in 1734 'an act to suppress petty ale houses and tippling houses within this Isle' was passed to reduce totals to 250. But this was to no avail: by the 1750s there were 475.

Under the Taverns Act 1857, one could only apply for a licence in one of the island's four market towns or one mile of it providing that at least one sitting room for exclusive use of visitors was included, plus two bedrooms for accommodation of strangers excluding the family and servants.

Also, if it was not within one mile of [such a] town, then at least one spare bedroom sitting room was made available for travellers and there was a stable within convenient distance.

A general licence would enable you to sell ale, wines and spirits for six days a week – Sundays excluded.

A special seven-days a week



**A sample of some of the 'Publicity' for the island's drinking establishments**

licence could only be issued for locations more than four miles from one of the island's four market towns and was used to revitalise those who were genuine travellers.

Sadly many establishments have long since disappeared and, with the introduction of legislation which directly or indirectly impacted on the customer base – eg. drink and

drive, plus Covid-19 regulations – the number of such icons is continuing to dwindle.

So should we ensure that we 'pickle' some of the establishments – perhaps as well as ourselves?! We will sample the ongoing fortunes of a few of them.

The island's oldest licensed premises, having been classed as a coaching inn in 1786,

is the former Ballachrink farmhouse in Kirk Michael acquired by Colonel Wilks and, through his daughter's marriage, inherited by the Buchan family. By 1839, the venue was substantial. Farmhouses always face somewhere between southeast and west. Perhaps in deference to the courthouse, its lockup and a reputed linking escape tunnel,

the original three-bay farmhouse – the centre building of the group – faces west.

Built of shone stone, plans show up the thickest when demarcating the oldest walls. The layout was typically asymmetrical – a result of the extra thick walls usually on the southwest or gable, accommodating the chiollagh used for cooking which was sometimes the only source of heating.

Outbuildings accommodated stabling, cowhouse, mucklagh (piggery) and a coach house (former fire station).

**W**ith Wilks' reverend father having close connections with Bishop Hildersley, the latter loaned his characteristic headgear, the Mitre, for its name. Periodically, a crown was added. With the courthouse nearby (as featured in BAR edition 19) and a fairfield behind, business was brisk.

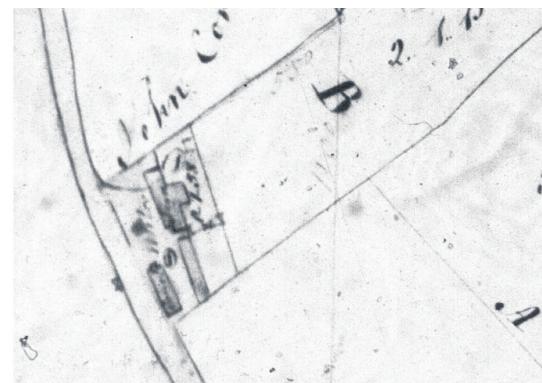
Not to be outdone, the hotel opposite the courthouse in Ramsey adopted the same name and both still survive as watering holes in their respective conservation areas. Recently repainted, Kirk Michael's is proposed for registration and a decision awaited.

Whether steaming or coaching between the two, 'the doors of the new Sulby Glen Hotel were for the first time thrown open to travellers' on July 19, 1881, according to the Isle of Man Natural History and Antiquarian Society (the authors of these BAR articles).

Awaiting travellers between Ramsey's courthouse and the later Palace (MER) sta-



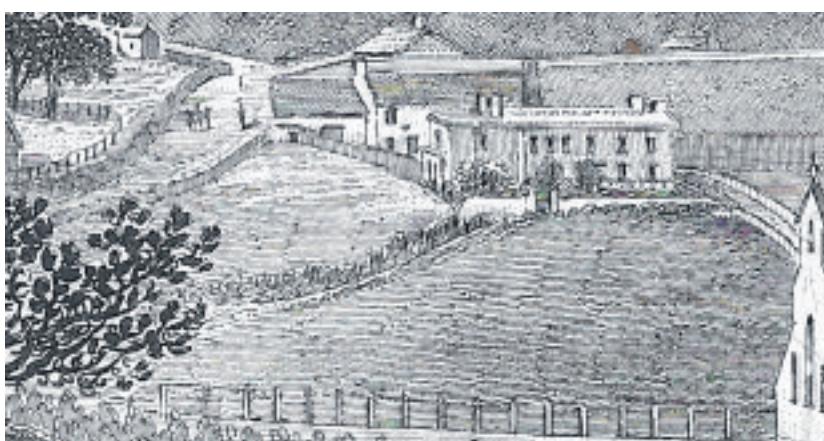
**The Mitre Hotel and public house in Kirk Michael**



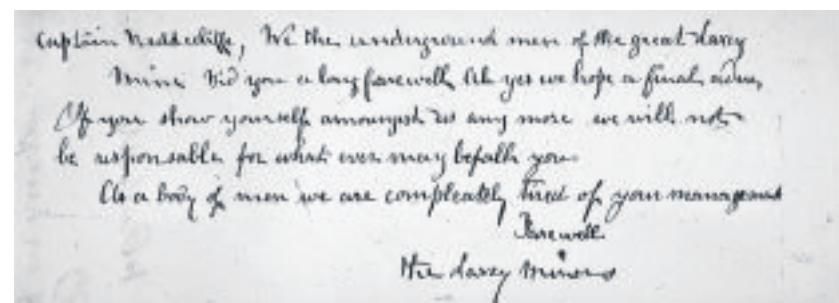
**The Michael Mitre tithe plan for Buchan**



**Ballure Inn, also known as Snowdrop Cottage**



**The extended mine captain's house in Laxey**



The letter from the Laxey miners to Captain Reddicliffe

tion, the striking but vacant Britannia/Waterloo (BAR 71) is now proposed for demolition and change of use to prevent future use for licensed premises.

Its future is a possible portent post Covid-19 for many free or otherwise houses. In England an application for full planning permission is required to demolish pubs or other drinking establishments, including those with expanded food provision.

In the island, no such safeguard exists for detached buildings not registered or in conservation areas (BAR 100).

Whether using Maughold Street, the Ramsey bypass (BAR 71) or MER, the registered Ballure Inn (Snowdrop Cottage) would provide for travellers to Douglas.

Its size belies its former role: tiny windows in its roof signal the existence of a second floor, while internally its staircase appears supported by cart shafts.

An outbuilding utilises tapering ship masts to support its roofs. Two wood suggane (stone pegs) on its gable indicate a former thatched roof.

Motoring along the line on February 19, 1845 the directors of the Lonan Mining Association agreed to appoint Captain Richard Rowe as agent for Laxey Mine on a salary of £150 per annum with house, free coals and free candles, citing 'Dr Garrett is to make such alterations to the cottage comfortable to Rowe's needs'.

Both family and house grew as the former thatched cottage became a five-bay house, doubled in size and was extended further - it was claimed in 1872 that it cost most than £2,000.

With not needing the rooms, declining fortunes of the mines, a 'final' (but failed) letter delivered to a successor at the house read as follows:

'Captain Reddicliffe, we the underground men of the great Laxey Mine bid you a long farewell. Ah yes we hope for a final adieu. If you show yourself amongst us any more we will not be responsible for what ever may befall you. As a body of men, we are completely tired of your management. Farewell, the Laxey Miners.'

After the arrival of the MER, the building was sold off. Some of the Snaefell miners were regaled in the front room

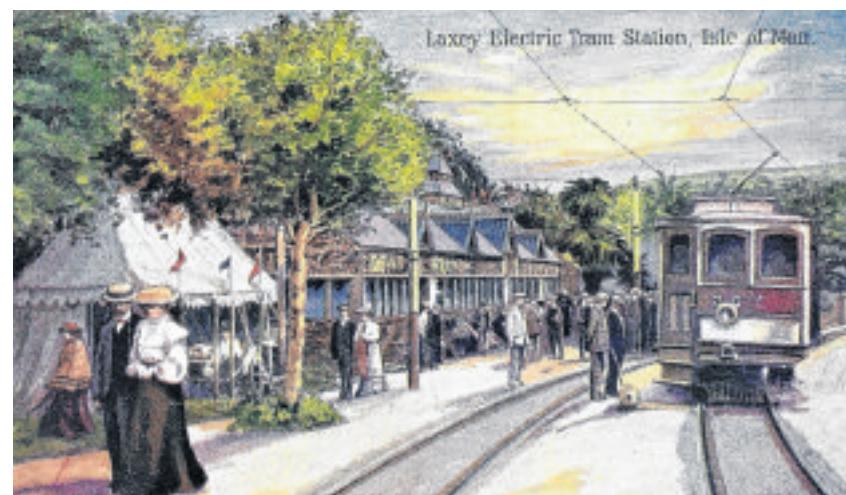
of Laggan Agneash, home of the Kewley family and in its solitary location as a farm, post house and halfway house to Snaefell.

At the captain's house the extension was demolished to make way for the tramway and plans were drawn up to convert it to a station, waiting room and refreshment room.

Licensing wars followed mining wars. In a hurry, James Bowling sought to surrender his current six-day short-term licence on Snaefell Railway premises in exchange for a seven-day licence for the ground floor rooms only to meet travellers' needs on both coast and mountain railways.

Objections ensued - there were only five pubs already in Laxey, two within 100 yards - and the licence was refused.

A Railway Refreshment License allowed the premises to be licensed six days a week and open only as late as the last tram passing through the station might be considered, but instead a new separate ornate wooden refreshment building was constructed and licensed. However, when the curving railway viaduct was completed in 1898, architect Mark Carine and the workforce celebrated the occasion at the Commercial (Coach & Horses/Laxey Health Clinic). Fortunes changed. By 1919



The refreshment rooms at Laxey station

the licensee of the station refreshment rooms lived in the former mines captain's house. Fortunately, the former burnt down and the license was immediately transferred.

The Station Hotel, changing its name to the Mines Tavern in 1973, was born. A rebirth, since modified, of its interior gave rise to a tramcar-shaped bar.

The basic layout of the captain's house remains a testimony to its valued history, but protected only by virtue of being in Laxey's conservation area.

Rattling along the MER 15 minutes later, competition was stiff between halfway houses on the Lonan/Onchan boundary.

Closing its doors in 2017, the Liverpool Arms - formerly Halfway House/Cleator's Inn/Union in Lonan - has become the subject of planning and legal disputes to prevent its change of use without sufficient evidence of its non-viability and the attachment of a restrictive condition to prevent reuse as licensed premises.

Like the Mines Tavern architecturally, it has been doubled in size giving a classic M-shape roof profile. Often the front, not the rear, was the later addition. It too continually tried to obtain a seven-day licence to cater for travellers.

If you travelled from Douglas Head to the pub you were a genuine traveller who had travelled more than miles from the start of your journey, but if you only came from Deemes Road then you hadn't.

The proof was on the milestone just opposite the licensee's bedroom window on the Laxey side, but beyond the front entrance.

Not until after MER arrived in 1911 was a compromise reached. A seven-day licence for the summer months and a six-day one for the winter months was issued on condition that the second Halfway House/Prince of Wales Hotel (Sunnyside) - then also owned by Mr Fox - withdrew its li-



The Mines Tavern tram bar



The boarded-up Liverpool Arms public house and (inset) the milestone

cence application. En route to Douglas at risk from demolition and replacement by three houses, registration of Groudball Hotel (BAR 27) is being challenged.

**T**erminus Tavern/Strathallan Hotel was built in 1892 as Strathallan Lodge and the residence of Major Pollock, founder of the former Derby Castle entertainment complex.

It is surviving amidst the turmoil of a horse tram car shed being rebuilt and the question mark of the redevelopment of the former Sumnerland site - new permanent stabling or car park.

'Neigh' said the 'trammers' trotting past the registered Queen's (Crescent) Hotel, according to artwork on the balcony railings - an association of three buildings and stabling associated with the Duke of Atholl's Castle Mona.

From the Sea Terminal, a stagger will take you to several remaining Douglas pubs.

Opposite the Saddle, a ferry from outside the registered Liver Inn (part of the former Newson's) ran to another battle-linked name The Trafalgar, formerly South Quay Tavern.

On land sold by Calcott

Heywood in 1818, Mr Vance fulfilled the condition of building a property within a year but promptly fell into debt and a sale was forced. His successor met the same fate.

By 1830, Thomas Kerruish is recorded as a Braddan licensee associated with the premises.

Drinkwaters, related by marriage to Liverpool's mayor, bought it. Around 1849 'Trafalgar' sailed in, possibly linked to Liverpool's Trafalgar Quay.

Timeously, an agreement with the neighbours stated the pub would not be further extended outwards onto the quay.

Perhaps later when re-fronted in brick, the landlord decided that building the upstairs windows was a way to snatch some additional light and a view beyond. Now the neighbours have consent for demolition and rebuild - but the Trafalgar, still architecturally sailing windward, is vacant not protected and at risk.

From the colourful history and architecture of our drinking establishments, it is appreciated why UK legislation halted their demolition or change of use without specific planning consent.

Ellan Vannin should not be allowed to call time on our pubs. Hic!



The Trafalgar in Douglas, formerly known as South Quay Tavern