

BUILDINGS AT RISK

Michael Street in Peel: an architectural time travel trip

Our *Buildings at Risk* series covers buildings and structures at risk, lost, and saved. This week, **Vicki Gillings** of Peel Heritage Trust looks at Michael Street in Peel - a fine example of how buildings can survive or evolve and find new lives, while maintaining both their own character and the distinct character of our towns and villages

Michael Street in Peel is a varied, colourful collection of independent shops.

If you look up above the eye-catching window displays you will see that the shops come in various styles, ages and finishes.

Some are the original Manx cottages, some are 1880s dedicated shops leading up to the building of the elegant Paradise and Gell shop.

Every shop has a different story from extravagant publicity claims to ghosts, and the buildings have evolved, just like the name has changed from 'the Kirk Michael road' to 'Michael Street'.

Although in Slater's Directory of 1852 the only references are to Michael Street, when Brown's Directory was produced in 1881. Those who had pretensions were still using the original name of Kirk Michael Street, resulting in almost equal mix of addresses.

Its name had been officially changed in 1874 from Kirk Michael Street to Michael Street although many had clung to the old name.

Even as late as the 1920s, the Peel City Guardian ran articles to confirm these name changes. We are a bit conservative in Peel.

By the middle of the 19th century, a building boom had



Early cottages, some still residential, others part-commercial. (Inset) Streetscape, little changed a century later

started, resulting in developments like Peveril Terrace for the tourist trade and new residents.

Commercial use crept into Michael Street, usually

with the ground-floor front room becoming the shop, or sometimes office, and the family continuing to live in the rest of the property; although as late as 1881 there were still many fisher-folk living in Michael Street.

When Primitive Methodism reached Peel in the 1830s, they occupied an upper-floor room in the old barracks in Orry Lane.

Once they were established, they obtained a site in the middle of Michael Street, redeveloping it with the chapel building which still exists as the main part of 'Simpson's Superstore', whose entrance covers part of the former chapel forecourt.

The Michael Street Chapel was superseded by Christian Street Chapel in 1878.

By 1852 it had been joined by the Bank of Mona and an identifiably 'bank building' now occupies the build-

ing across the lane from the chapel.

The Bank of Mona failed in 1878 when its parent company, the Bank of Glasgow, went into liquidation, and the property was taken over by a succession of other banks, and is now a commercial premises.

In 1852, there were a number of businesses that we now do not see in Michael Street, including a blacksmiths, a boot and shoe maker, a dyer, a joiner, a sail barker, and a watch and clock maker.

Over the years, other premises were being redeveloped and yet there are still areas of the street where the buildings have hardly changed.

As a result, there is a spectrum from old cottages - some still residential, some converted to shops or offices, and a range of purpose-built commercial premises.

Two groups of buildings are particularly conspicuous - both have great stories and demonstrate that even though some changes have been made over the years, you can still see the original architecture.

Orry Buildings is at the corner of Orry Lane and Michael Street, painted blue in the recent photograph. The two shops next door painted green are now joined and is the home of the Peel Co-op.

The shops and accommodation were built by Ambrose Kelly for Robert Harrison in the early 1880s. Robert Harrison was a merchant who lived with his family in 13 Castle Street.

He wanted to move and put his Castle Street property up for sale.

The sales advert in the Peel City Guardian mentions 'excellent shop, dry wine cellars, good airy warehouse,

stabling, 12 head cow house and commodious home for a large family'.

They lived and traded in Castle Street from late 17th century onward if his advertisements are to be believed. 13 Castle Street contained everything you might need for provisioning boats and everyday life including alcohol.

Castle Street or Big Street was as vibrant as any port district could be.

Robert Harrison appeared to be a canny business man and wanted to move up in life to Michael Street.

Presumably this was the up and coming trading area. Unfortunately, he was not always so canny. He had shares in the ill-fated Dumbell's bank which crashed in 1900.

Ambrose Kelly's firm built the new block of three shops for Mr Harrison. The Kelly family were local builders



Former Bank premises



24-26 Michael Street, with its elaborate frontage

and craftsman.

Kelly subsequently built and lived in the distinctive buildings with oriel windows in Christian Street opposite the sandstone Phillip Christian centre.

Kelly was also a skilled joiner and wood carver, who made the House of Keys speaker's chair which is still in use today. The Kelly family story is extensively covered in the excellent book by Mike Clague entitled 'Reapers, Clogs and Pulpits'.

Robert Harrison used the Orry building for his shop, warehouse and family accommodation.

He was a licensed wine and spirits merchant. Extending down Orry Lane was

his warehouse with a high-level door for loading stores. No hoist remains unfortunately today.

The Orry building has an extensive cellar extending from Michael Street and down Orry Lane to the back of the property under the warehouse.

There are small cellar windows on the Orry Lane face, these have been mostly obscured by subsequent raising of the road height.

The glass bricks which light the cellar are still seen set in the Michael Street pavement. Will these be retained during the regeneration? This cellar apparently stored 36,000 bottles of wine and numerous hogsheads of spirits. It also had washing and drying facilities for over 12,000 bottles. We often forget that spirits and wines were often bottled locally from large hogshead barrels. Mr Harrison's Peel City Guardian advertisements made various claims of his storage facilities. One mentions 100,000 bottles of beer and spirits.

In 1897 the trading boat Progress off-loaded the largest consignment of Christmas goods to a single business in Peel for Mr Harrison. Duty alone was £133 which is just over £13,000 in today's value. Christmas 1897 obviously went with a bang in Peel!

He sold seeds to firewood, wines and spirits to celebrated gold medal manure and everything in between.

I like to think it was like Arkwright's 'Open All Hours' shop and you never came out empty handed. The family accommodation above the shop was built to a high standard if the stairs and front door are representative of the finish.

The two shops next door were rented to Thomas Lawrence in March 1890 (These are painted green in the photograph).

There was a goods hoist and upper floor warehouse door between these two shops, both extant. Thomas Lawrence had just been made the first postmaster for Peel and used the shop next to Orry Buildings as the Post Office with a chemists/druggist next to that. Peel and Michael Street were looking up!

The other prominent group, now occupied by Paradise and Gell, was designed by John J. Boyd of Ramsey in 1903 for GB and TW Kermode as shops with accommodation over - they remained as two shops until the 1980s.

They are a particularly outstanding example of 'Ruabon' brick construction, with large plate glass windows and terracotta finials and flourishes.

The finish of this building is to a very high standard. The finials and terracotta panels are stunning. The fine glazing details and glass of 28/30 are original.

The shop design shouts at you to look at the merchandise in the large windows. On the upper floors the fire-



The former Primitive Methodist Chapel

places and surrounds are all original. If you walk through the shop and up the beautiful stairs the original layout of the shop and accommodation is easily visualised. The owners welcome you to come and look at the building.

In 1972 the present proprietor moved into number 28 with his family and lived above the shop for some years. The fireplaces and surrounds are still present in what was the living quarters. At that stage it was still divided into two shops with Lipton's supermarket next door.

Mr Paradise sympathetically restored the front window of number 26 when combining the shops in the 1980s.

Even though some changes have happened over its long history the architectural story is easy to see.

This is extremely unusual in a shop building of this quality.

There are more Peel buildings built with North Wales bricks such as the Police Station/New Court House, Creg Malin Hotel and the old Co-op in Market Street. Apparently, these bricks were return cargo for the Peel bound ships returning from North Wales after transporting Foxdale ore. The bricks are all often described as Ruabon bricks but there are other brick makers in North Wales, some of whom made yellow Flintshire premier bricks, often seen either in terraces in Douglas or as the cornerstones in chimneys.

Buckley, in Flintshire, originally produced 'Buckley Ware' which was pottery kitchen-ware and crockery. They also produced the buff coloured ridge tiles seen on many Welsh-slatted Manx roofs. If you walk through Buckley the houses look

similar to Peel with their red-brick and terracotta details.

Ruabon produced a catalogue of their extensive range of patterned and shaped bricks, and all you needed to do was to select from the catalogue. Ruabon bricks became so popular in the late Victorian period they were often used for public buildings, such as town halls and particularly railway stations. In the Isle of Man, some brickworks produced similar style bricks, particularly the Ballanard brickworks.

How lucky we are to have such diverse retail architecture still present in Peel and it certainly warrants a second look. Just be careful as you walk along Michael Street with your eyes looking above the shop fronts as you may just miss a bargain - or the ghost! That is a story for another time.

It is to be hoped that the distinctive character of Michael Street isn't lost in the proposed 'regeneration' scheme. All of the island's towns and villages must retain their own individual character.



Not Ruabon but have you ever noticed this?



Orry Buildings Photo: Mike Clague



JJ Boyd's plans for Kermode's new premises (now Paradise and Gell) showing not only the façade which is still intact, but also how much more there is behind the street line