

BUILDINGS AT RISK

Looking back at Douglas

Buildings at Risk looks at our built heritage around the island and how it evolves. This week Frank Cowin of the Isle of Man Natural History and Antiquarian Society analyses a remarkably architecturally accurate engraving from 1805, telling the story of some of the buildings that still survive and others lost over the last two centuries.

Recent articles have looked at the development of the piers and harbour facilities at Douglas.

This time we look at a print published Nov 1, 1895 prepared from a drawing by Edward Meredith and dedicated by him "To the most Noble Prince JOHN DUKE OF ATHOL" who at that time was Governor in Chief of the island.

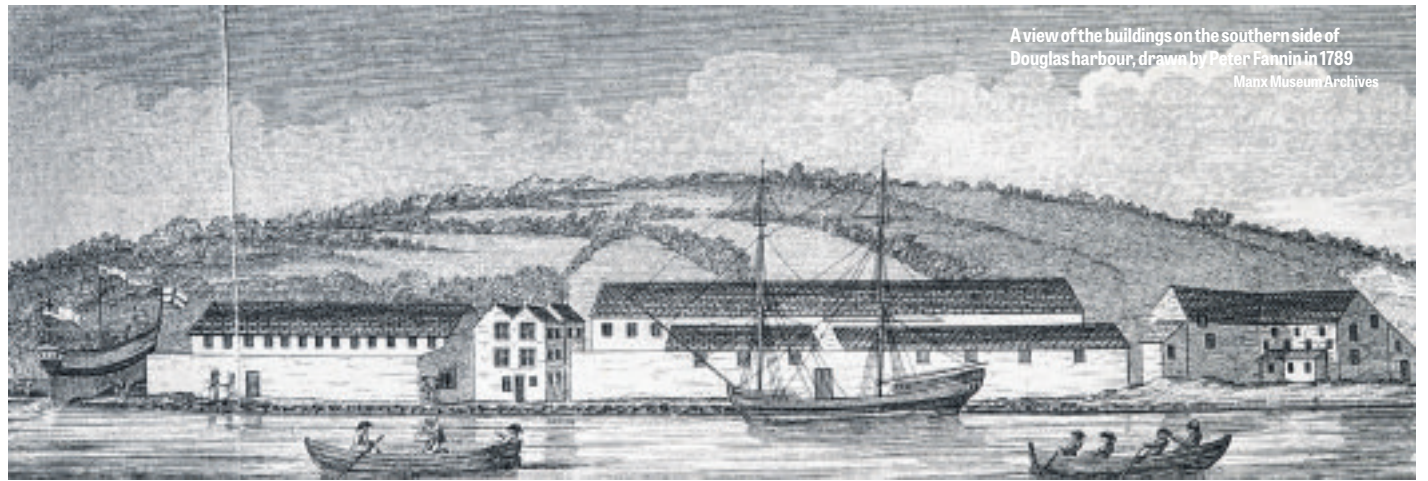
The print depicts the situation as it was at that time and shows not only the newly-constructed Red Pier designed by George Steuart, but almost the whole of the town of Douglas as it existed at that time.

The view is from Douglas Head at a point near where the 'Gas Works Steps' now join the Head Road. The background hills look rather steeper-sided than is actually the case but it gives great, and remarkably accurate, detail of buildings in the town.



Old St Matthew's Church and the Douglas Hotel

Manx Museum Art Collection



A view of the buildings on the southern side of Douglas harbour, drawn by Peter Fannin in 1789
Manx Museum Archives

At the right-hand end we see the Red Pier with its ornamental lighthouse and beyond that the empty Conister or St Mary's Rock, not to be crowned with the Tower of Refuge for another 27 years.

On the left the view just includes St George's Church with its still unused burial ground not yet enclosed.

Immediately to the right of the church and just beyond it is Hills House - home of the Moore family - which, along with the church, are the only buildings which have yet fully 'jumped' the raised beach cliff line to extend Douglas inland.

Indeed the town peters out with John Street - the roadway

which now gives access to the Marks and Spencer car park - and Wellington Street, and near the sea front to just beyond Callow's Slip, now Regent Street.

Even Athol Street, which was the first major uptown development, was only laid out with road and building plots by John Taggart, the local-born architect, in 1810. Finch Road followed some 10 years later.

In the distance just above the tide line is the 'Ducal Palace' designed for the Duke of Atholl again by his favoured architect George Steuart.

At this stage, it is newly-constructed and the print shows its two original lodge buildings just where Glen Falcon at Broadway cuts through the cliff line. There are very few other dwellings scattered along the further shoreline.

In the immediate foreground is the Head Road appearing to be quite narrow and confined by two stone-built walls.

The right to construct

a roadway in future was retained by the Heywood family when they sold the land at the upper end of the south side of the harbour, and this was later developed by the Gelling family.

Just beyond the roadway can be seen the roofs of three buildings down at harbour level - the only ones visible on the south side of the harbour. A picture of these buildings and the area adjacent to them, along with a note of their usage, is given on the map by Peter Fannin published in 1789.

The two larger buildings parallel to the harbour were Red Herring Houses built in 1772 at the same time as the Red Herring Houses at Derbyhaven.

These mark the start of smoked fish as a commercial industry in the island, and which eventually lead to Manx kippers. Red Herrings were smoked whole and then barrelled and exported, very often to the Caribbean.

Alongside the warehouse on the right in the Meredith

print, not visible on it but shown and labelled on the Fannin map, was a shipyard.

The twin-gabled building between the smokehouses is labelled as a dwelling. This became the home of the owners of the Red Herring Houses - the Holmes Brothers who were bankers as well as merchants.

The house became their banking chambers as well as their home and, after the last of the three brothers died there in the 1880s in his blind and feeble old age, the bank was put into liquidation which took many years to complete.

Also shown and labelled on the Fannin map beyond the inner smokehouse was a brewery.

Peter Fannin was, as he claimed on his map, a Master in His Majesty's Royal Navy. He had served as Master - responsible for the sailing management of a ship including its navigation.

His early career as a Mas-

ter was largely on Sloops and Cutters around the coast of the British Isles, including the Irish Sea Station which had Ramsey Bay as one of its main anchorages but which after Revestment its sloops and cutters came into Douglas harbour.

The high point of his career came with his appointment as Master of HMS Adventure under Captain Furneaux as the second ship on Captain Cook's second voyage to Australia and New Zealand in 1772.

The low part of that journey must surely have been when Fannin, together with Mr Burney the Second Lieutenant, led a search party after a boat and 10 men had gone missing whilst ashore to get water. They eventually found evidence that the party had been killed and eaten by cannibals.

When Fannin returned, he set up a school of navigation in one of the rooms of the then home of Peter John Heywood, an ex-Deemster and now seneschal for the Duke of Atholl.



The Hills House, Circular Road, Douglas - built in the 18th century by Philip Moore

Isle of Man Natural History and Antiquarian Society

in 1805



'To the most Noble Prince, JOHN, DUKE OF ATHOL' - drawn by Edward Meredith and engraved for printing by Joseph Constantine Sadler, published November 1, 1805
Manx Museum Art Collection

This property had been built by a firm of merchants - Ross, Black and Christian. With the coming of Revestment - the purchase of the sovereign rights in the Isle of Man by the English Crown from the Duke of Atholl in 1765, Ross, Black and Christian moved their activities to Dunkirk and the Duke had bought the property.

Peter John Heywood, who had owned the Nunnery and much of Douglas Head, had sold them when he retired as deemster and moved to Whitehaven.

When he returned as Seneschal to the Duke, he was given a life tenancy of the quayside property as part of his remuneration.

The property still survives with 'DOUGLAS HOTEL' emblazoned across its frontage despite now being offices. It is clearly visible in the Meredith print behind the masts of the ship projecting above the Holmes brothers' buildings.

To the left of the Douglas Hotel can be seen St Matthew's Church built in 1708 and demolished in the 1890s clearances and replaced on a different site and designed by John Loughborough Pearson who also designed the present Braddan Parish Church.

To the right of the Douglas Hotel, on the later site of the Clarendon, is the 'Lord's Store' which was used in the late 18th century to house the guns and powder of the Naval Sloops and Cutters when they visited Douglas.

To the right of the Lord's Store, fronting onto the quayside, is the Coffee Palace which gave its name to the berthage seaward from that point to Double Corner.

The latter is where the harbour wall projects forward and is now the site of the lifting bridge which succeeded the swing bridge. Prior to the swing bridge, there was

a 'plank walkway' at low tide and replaced by a ferry when the tide was in, across the harbour at the outer end of the Tongue.

The road way through to the sea from Double Corner and joining the harbour to Fort Street had been known as The Parade or Parade Street,

and was where William Bligh and his new wife took up residence after their marriage in Onchan Church.

Bligh first visited the island as a midshipman on board HM Ranger. In succeeding years, he served on other vessels visiting the island and, as the son of a Revenue Officer at

Plymouth, it was only natural that he should visit the Revenue Officer in Douglas whose daughter he eventually married.

Her parents, the Bethams, lived at Hague Farm, Onchan and are buried near the stile which gives access to the churchyard at Onchan Parish

Church. The Blighs' first child was christened in the then St Mathews's.

The mother, brothers and sister of Fletcher Christian lived in Fort Street when she left Ewan Rig after her husband died, leaving her with financial troubles.

Peter John Heywood, the

Duke of Atholl's Seneschal, was the father of Peter Heywood 'bounty mutineer' who was sentenced to death after his return to England, before being pardoned and taken back into the Navy and went on to become a Captain famed for his survey work around the coast of South America.

The 'Bounty Story' then has its roots in the Douglas harbourside area and many naval officers who went on to achieve great things visited it, or even lived there for a period of years.

A few years back, Douglas Harbour was being claimed and signposted as a 'heritage harbour'.

Since then, many of the older buildings which gave it its character have been demolished and replaced, or left empty for development with buildings of a differing character.

Other pictures of the area show how some of the other buildings of note have come and gone, and will be the subject of a future article.



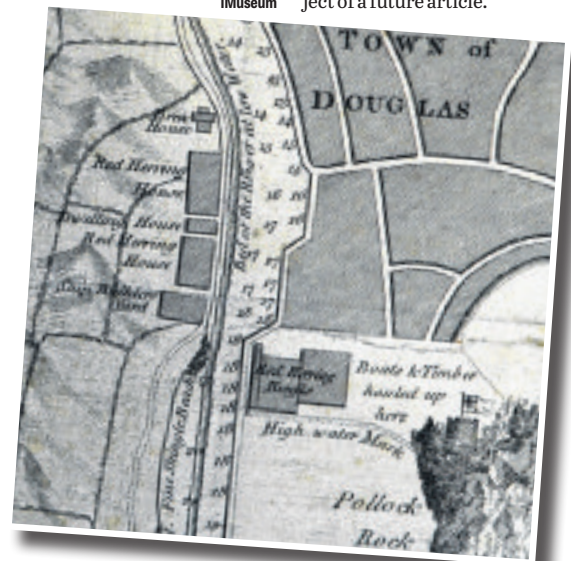
The Douglas Hotel - former Heywood home, then hotel, now offices



The former Holmes Brothers' house and Bank in the 1930s, described by the photographer John James Frowde as 'Holmes Bros Bank with the lid off' as demolition looks to have started
iMuseum



(Above) A close-up depiction of St George's and Hills House and (below) a similar close-up of Douglas North Quay (both from Meredith)



Plan of the area on at the seaward end of the southern side of Douglas harbour, drawn by Peter Fannin in 1789. Note Douglas Fort on the Pollock Rock, also the lack of Douglas Head Road - in 1789 there was just a sea-side road/track to Fort Anne and beyond
Manx Museum Archives