

BUILDINGS AT RISK

Early Methodist buildings and 'Bishop Ward' churches

Buildings at Risk covers buildings and structures – dwellings, commercial and civic – lost, at risk and saved. In this fifth instalment, **Frank Cowin** of the IoM Natural History and Antiquarian Society continues his look at the evolution of the Manx Church and its buildings.

This article looks at the early Methodist buildings in the island and the introduction of Messrs Hansom and Welch (architects) by Bishop Ward in his attempt to improve the provision of Anglican churches.

The original Douglas Methodist Chapel was built in 1786 on land described as Corris's Garden which was part of the then large garden Wesley had walked in during his second visit in 1781.

On this visit he travelled more widely around the island and praised most of what he saw.

The replacement for this original Douglas Chapel was Thomas Street, the first of the really big chapels intended for large town congregations.

It was built on extra land adjoining the original Chapel which was retained for Sunday School and other uses with part of the lower floor let out as a Joiner's Workshop.

In 1839, the Workshop was destroyed by fire along with many of the island's early Methodist records stored there.

The highway alongside this first Douglas Chapel had very quickly become known as Preaching House Lane.

In 1819, just before the new Chapel was built, it became Factory Lane following the move there of Moore's Flax Factory from its original quayside site.

In England, by 1808 some Methodists were becoming uneasy about the way the Church was moving.

It was becoming settled in its ways and was losing contact with a large part of the population that it had originally served.

The dissidents started



The original Douglas Methodist chapel is seen to the left of its replacement

preaching in the open air once again and holding large outside rallies – Camp Meetings.

The Methodist Conference reacted by expelling them and they broke away, under the leadership of Hugh Bourne and William Clowes, calling themselves 'The Primitive Methodist Church' because they were going back to their original roots – their primitive roots.

They were quickly nicknamed 'the Ranters', from their enthusiastic preaching, a name that stuck and which they used with pride.

The corresponding nickname for the Wesleyans was 'the Swaddlers', being those

who worshipped the swaddled child – the Christ Child of Bethlehem.

In the Isle of Man, this name seems to have been reserved for the full-time itinerant preachers.

By association the name 'Swaddler' appears to have passed to the poor quality limestone quarry waste which was given to the Wesleyans when they begged for stone from the quarries to build their early chapels. It was a very dark soft stone which disintegrates with damp and age.

At the beginning of 1823, the first missionary to the Isle of Man for the Primitive Methodists arrived.

John Butcher landed at Derbyhaven and made his early centre of activity at Colby.

Within the year, there were at least 14 meeting places, starting with a chapel at Clycur, near the Ballamodha crossroads, and Methodist Chapels were now marching two by two along the island's roads, one Wesleyan, one Primitive.

The first large Primitive Chapel was that described in the records as 'Factory Lane, Onchan'.

It was on the opposite side, just closer to the sea than the building which had been the original Douglas Wesleyan Chapel and was by now its Sunday School.

Factory Lane was later renamed Wellington Street and the Primitive Methodist Chapel has been replaced by part of the Marks and Spencer site and the Thomas Street/Victoria Street Wesleyan Chapel site is now occupied by Barclays Bank and its car park. The Factory Lane Primitive Methodist Chapel was built in 1823/4, but later rebuilt and subsequently renamed Wellington Street Primitive Methodist Chapel.

One reason for the early success of the Primitive movement in the 1820s

was the attempts by Bishop Murray, or perhaps more particularly James McCrone his tithe agent, to enforce the collection of the tithes and to impose one on green crops, including potatoes which had not previously been collected. This led to the Potato Riots and ultimately to Bishop Murray being removed to another Diocese.

Up until this time, many Methodists in the Isle of Man had had dual membership, attending the Parish Church in the morning and the Methodist Chapel in the afternoon or evening. This practice, which had in general long since ceased in England, now quite quickly faded out in the island as well.

Bishop Murray was replaced by William Ward who arrived in 1827 who almost immediately started a massive programme of building, and rebuilding, of the island's Churches and he travelled extensively in England to raise money to help finance it.

Ward also set about changing the way the Bishop Barrow Trust operated so that it was used to found and run King William's College, a Church of England boys' boarding school which opened in 1833.

To design the college buildings, he brought in the architectural firm of Hansom and Welch who were responsible for the town hall building in Birmingham which was then under construction.

Joseph Aloysius Hansom invented the 'Patent Safety

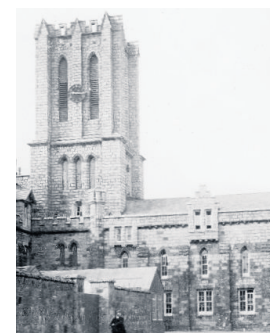
Cab', the Hansom Cab, the taxi of the Victorian Era. He was a Roman Catholic and responsible for a number of successful Catholic church designs in England.

Edward Welch, his partner, had a brother John who seems to have been delegated to look after the work on the island throughout the changing run of partnership names used here. Part of the reason for the partnership changes is, no doubt, bankruptcy due to problems with the Birmingham project.

Bishop Ward's fundraising activities had included approaches to the Church Commissioners, the Church



James McCrone, Bishop Murray's agent who was largely responsible for the Potato Riots, and hence Bishop Ward's arrival



King William's College – tower designed by John Welch



Ballasalla Mill Street Chapel

Building Society and the Church Enlarging Society. No funds were forthcoming from them but, nevertheless, the ideas in design that they were supporting were to a large extent followed in the churches built during Ward's time in the island.

One group of churches, 'The Triplets': St James' Dalby, St Luke's Baldwin, and St Stephen's Sulby were built to a common plan.

They were designed as multi-purpose buildings with two full width sliding screens dividing the interior into three sections only one of which was actually consecrated.

For well-attended services, all three sections could be used together whilst at other times the remainder of the building could be used either

as a hall or two classrooms for either Sunday or Day School purposes.

St Luke's was consecrated in 1836 and whilst St James' and St Stephen's were planned during the episcopacy of Ward, they were not completed until after his departure.

St Stephen's was altered much later and no longer resembles the other two.

The 'Ward' churches follow the movement away from the almost square auditory church with its sweeping galleries to a style closer to the older churches but, in many cases, still involving the use of galleries.

The Methodists, both Wesleyans and Primitives, however remained with the galleried church for its new large buildings but using a

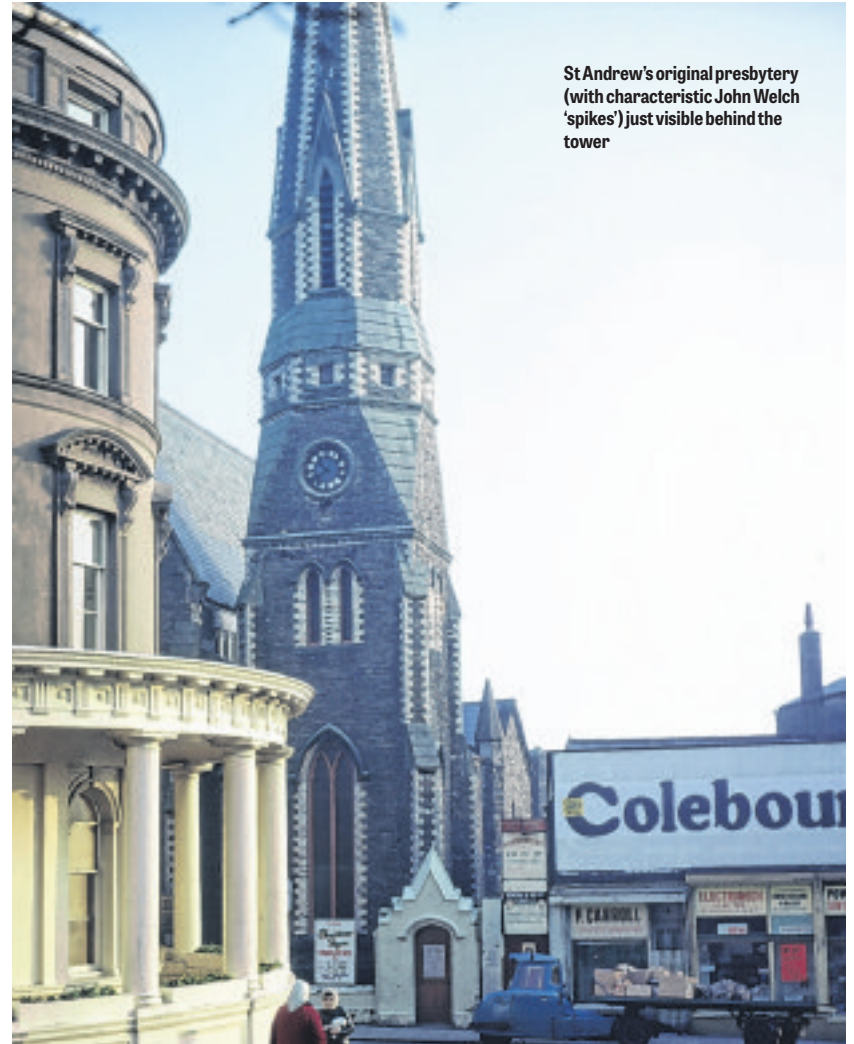


Bishop William Ward – Bishop of Sodor and Man 1827-38 (iMuseum)

simple rectangle, although with a raised central Pulpit and Choir seating across the front of the area for the smaller buildings.

A distinctive variant arose in a 'lecture theatre' style where, with a central side door, the seating was tiered to the rear.

It was a period of continuous expansion for Methodism with more new Chapels



St Andrew's original presbytery (with characteristic John Welch 'spikes') just visible behind the tower

but also much redevelopment, often in the form of a new Chapel with the old one becoming the Hall.

John Welch is perhaps best remembered for the Tower of Refuge, instigated by Sir William Hillary, and the Smelt Memorial in Castletown Square, the erection of which he, Welch, supervised to a design suggested by Sir William Hillary.

He was also responsible for many other secular schemes as well as churches or chapels for denominations other than the Church of England.

He designed the Scotch Kirk and its attached Presbytery in Finch Road, Douglas; which opened in 1832.

The Kirk itself was de-

molished in 1867, leaving the Presbytery, and replaced by a new bigger building designed by John Robinson and of which now only the spire survives.

In his 'Six Days' Tour by a Stranger' published dated 1st April 1836, Welch says of a building in Port St Mary: 'I perceive a Methodist Chapel built here, on the most beautiful site the village affords, which has been copied from the Scotch Kirk at Douglas; and these ingenious imitators have contrived also to copy sundry errors and mistakes too; which reminds me of what is said of an English Captain getting a new coat made by a Chinese tailor and sending the Knight of the Celestial Thimble an old

patched and mended. One as a pattern - when the new coat was completed and sent home, the Captain found to his great astonishment and mortification that not only had the form and size of the garment been most minutely copied, but also every patch and stitch, the artist fancying that such were some National decorations which he must not omit.'

● Over the next couple weeks we will break off from churches and chapels to look at how our built heritage has fared over the last five years and some of the issues relating to planning and the environment that will need to be tackled by the new House of Keys.



St Luke's in Baldwin



St James' in Dalby



St Stephen's Sulby