

BUILDINGS AT RISK

A new breed of architect and their new influences

Buildings at Risk covers buildings and structures lost, at risk and saved. In this sixth instalment, **Frank Cowin** of the Isle of Man Natural History and Antiquarian Society continues his look at the evolution of the Manx Church and its buildings.

The local born architect/builder John Taggart, who was responsible for Thomas Street Wesleyan Chapel, had also built the Douglas Covered Market in Duke Street, with which it had a number of external features in common, and the first of the Bishop Ward Churches. Lonan (new Parish Church dedicated to All Saints.

Taggart also appears to have designed, and perhaps built, the Independent Chapel in Athol Street almost matching his National Daily and Sunday School at the other end of the street, which was the first building to be completed when the street was formed in 1809/1810.

The Independent Chapel which opened in 1811 ultimately had the Chapel upstairs with a number of shop or workshop units below.

These included the establishment of Messrs Bregazzi, Gilders and Picture Framers, together with the workshop of a firm of organ builders.

In 1866, by now part of the Congregational Church, the members planned a new



The 'new' St Mary de Ballaugh, designed by John Welch

Photo: Peter Killey

building in Buck's Road, Finch Hill Chapel, whilst a breakaway group moved to Circular Road and built what was ultimately to become the Bethel.

This building during its lifetime provided a home for the early meetings of a number of Church groups.

In England, the Catholic Relief Act provoked the Gordon Riots of 1780 amongst those with an anti-Catholic fervour but in the Isle of Man the irregular and secretive visits of priests from Ireland were already becoming more regular and open.

Indeed, by 1779 Father Oswald Johnston of Whitehaven was making regular visits and holding Mass at his lodgings in John Street, Douglas.

Two years earlier, in 1777, John Wesley had commented in his journal 'they have but six Papists, and no Dissenters, in the island'.

Up till this time, the Roman Catholic community met in relative secrecy, with services held at Lag ny Keeilley, where

open-air Mass is still held periodically.

The Keeill at Kerrowkeill, Malew, was used regularly until 1873 when a new owner destroyed all that remained of it to stop the practice.

Services and burials were also held at St Michael's Isle, Derbyhaven, and Father Collins, who had come to the island with the Fagan family when they fled Ireland in 1798 and had ministered to the Irish fishermen at Castletown, was buried there when he died in 1811.

The Catholic Emancipation Act was finally passed in England in 1829 but, by this time there were two well established public places of worship in the island for the Roman Catholic faithful - St Brigid, Douglas, and St Mary's, Castletown.

St Brigid's Chapel was built in a disused quarry alongside the Old Castletown Road on land which had been part of the Nunnery Estate.

The land was the subject

of a 'sympathetic' sale from Lt Colonel Taubman to the Revd Miles McPharlan who had given up his lodgings in Dublin to Taubman when the Manx Fencibles were serving there in 1798.

The building became too small and too ruinous and a property was bought at the junction of Athol Street and Prospect Hill.

This building had been erected by the Methodist Friendly Society in 1810 but increased costs meant it was uneconomic and it was sold. It became a theatre but again did not succeed and in 1832, it was purchased by Father Gahan, the then resident priest, converted and in late 1836 began to be used as a place of worship dedicated to St Francis Xavier with a school on the floor below.

St Mary's, Castletown, was built, not without difficulty as the part-built gable blew down during a gale, in Bowling Green Road and opened in 1829.

The gallery columns are the very distinctive design used by Thomas Brine, who had been the architect for St Mary's Anglican Church in Castletown, in a number of other buildings - secular as well as sacred.

One 'oddity' during this period was the arrival of 'The Mariners' or 'Floating' chapel sometimes called the 'de Grey Chapel'.

Bishop Ward, in response to an urgent need for a further chapel in Douglas at a time when the British Navy was decommissioning and/or disposing of vessels, appealed to Earl Grey (he of the tea) when he was First Lord of the Admiralty in 1834-5.

The result was the gift from the Admiralty of a redundant former frigate which was fitted out in Douglas Harbour as a chapel for seafarers.

By 1846, it had outlived its purpose and become beyond

repair; it was sold as scrap for £600 which was put towards the building of St Thomas's Church.

The 1820s and 1830s had seen the start of the Oxford Movement initially a University based group re-examining ideas and ideals of earlier times and using tracts (pamphlets) to spread them.

Among their leaders were John Keble, who wrote an important 'Life of Bishop Wilson' published as part of the Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology, and J H Newman who converted to Roman Catholicism in 1845, becoming a Cardinal and a very important leader of religious thought - he was recently beatified as Saint John Henry.

The Oxford Movement itself had very little effect on Church Liturgy or design but it inspired a group at Cambridge to set themselves up as the The Camden Society, later to become The Ecclesiological Society which had a very great impact on Anglican Church



Thomas Brine's signature columns. Left St Mary's Anglican Church, Castletown; centre Lorne House; right St Mary's Catholic Church, Castletown



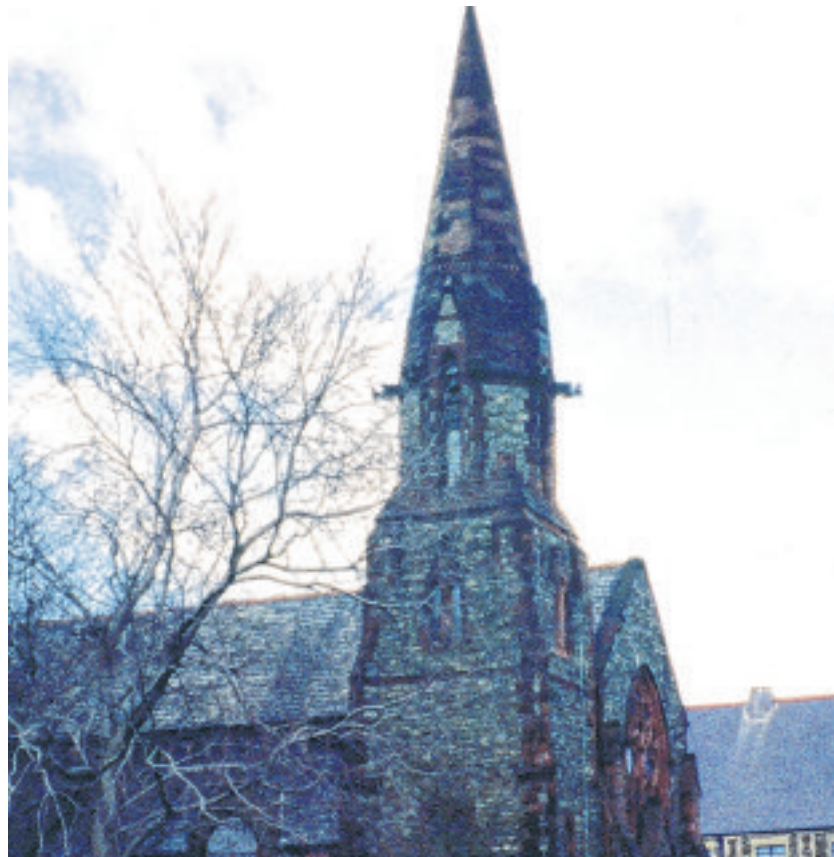
St Michael's Chapel, Fort Island

Photo: Peter Killey



Lag ny Keeilley

Photo: Peter Killey



Finch Hill Chapel, Buck's Road

design for the next hundred years.

It wasn't until 1848 that one of the leaders of this movement, the prolific hymn writer John Mason Neale, visited the Isle of Man and published his views on Manx Church buildings.

As an ecclesiologist, anything more recent than the late Gothic of the 16th Century was modem and of no worth. The only thing to get his unqualified approval was the Maughold market cross.

Some of the 'modem' and indeed to us not so modem buildings attracted quite scathing comment.

One such comment, taken up by a number of guide writers, was that Ballaugh new church was 'notable for nothing but its ugliness'.

This, taken together with

the comment by Rector Hugh Stowell that it was 'the best of his (John Welch's) bad designs', speaks volumes of the turmoil with regard to church design at this time.

The varying new ideas brought changes in the design of new buildings and alterations to many of the older buildings.

The Rev Joseph Christian Moore was appointed Archdeacon in 1844, and for the next 40 years became the main influence on Anglican church building in the Isle of Man.

Despite having been at Oxford in the 1820s and living off-island for 20 years, he was not a Tractarian and, as a result, the island absorbed the new ideas more slowly and quietly than might otherwise have been the case.

He thought his church at Andreas 'a barn of a place' and set about improving both it and the Rectory, initially at his own cost.

He was independently wealthy, having sold his interest in the family business of Moore's Sailcloth factory, now at Tromode to where they had moved from Factory Lane, to his brother.

His sister-in-law was the sister of Joseph Henry Christian and her cousin was Ewan Christian who were both architects.

Henry had been a student of Ewan's and then worked with him, and later went into partnership with him and another former pupil of Ewan's, CH Purdey. Another of Joseph Henry Christian's sisters, Jemima, was married to yet another architect, John

Loughborough Pearson.

Ewan Christian is said to have worked on more than 1,000 church properties with a list of personal commissions about twice that and the largest of any Victoria Architect.

He became President of the Royal Institute of British Architects, still the only Manx person to have done so, and was awarded the Institute's Gold Medal.

His most prestigious commission was probably that for the National Portrait Gallery in London.

Joseph Henry Christian became President of the Architecture Association, the rival organisation, and when Ewan died, William Douglas Caroe, who had been a pupil of JL Pearson, joined Joseph and CH Purdey in the partnership.

All four, Ewan and Joseph

Christian, John Loughborough Pearson and WD Caroe worked with the Ecclesiastical Commissioners in England and featured heavily in the design of churches, and other projects, in the Isle of Man. Ewan commenced in 1846 with St Thomas', Douglas; then Marown, Christ Church Laxey, Christ Church Dhoon, Cronkbourne Village Chapel/Schoolroom and the Abbey Church Ballasalla, which was not completed until just after his death in 1895.

Joseph, having been involved with Braddan School and Schoolmaster's House and the Mental Hospital at Ballamona, Braddan, designed Bride Parish Church and altered Andreas and added its campanile tower.

John Loughborough Pearson, whose major work was

Truro Cathedral, designed Kirk Braddan new Parish Church and St Matthew's, Douglas, which was completed by his son, Frederick, who also designed the halls for both.

Pearson was the only one of the four to be heavily influenced by the Ecclesiologists and Pugin, but later developed a style which would be quite at home in France.

WD Caroe was the architect for St Ninian's, Douglas; built with funds provided by Henry Bloom Noble and his Trustees.

This was a time of great church building so the four Ecclesiastical Commissioners' architects were far from being the only architects designing churches in the Isle of Man in the middle and later years of the 19th Century.



Athol Street, Douglas: Left - the Taggart-designed National Daily and Sunday School which was the first building to be completed when Athol street was formed in 1809-1810; centre - St Francis Xavier's chapel (built by the Methodists, then used as a theatre, then a Catholic Chapel and school); right - the building that replaced Francis Xavier's chapel