

BUILDINGS AT RISK

Manx church: Cathedrals and Tynwald chapels

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

Richard Lane of Manchester designed St John's chapel which was consecrated in March 1849.

This is the government chapel and the internal layout reflects its use as the Tynwald Court Room on Tynwald Day.

The seats with tables at the crossing of the transept are those of the 24 Members of the House of Keys, including the Speaker.

These seats are named to the Member and the Constituency that they represent and the name plates are kept up to date in line with any changes in Keys membership as are those on the seats for the Legislative Council in the Chancel.

Tynwald would presumably have been a pagan Viking institution in the early days of Viking rule and, as such, have met on Midsummer's Day.

The formal acceptance of Christianity by the Norse rulers, possibly as a result of the visit of Olaf Tryggvasson King of Norway in 985, would have seen a change of date to the nearest Christian Saint's Feast Day, June 24, that of St John the Baptist.

The calendar changes of 1752 were not popular and, in the Isle of Man, people refused to change the Saints' Days and the Fair Days, giving us Old Christmas Day in January and Tynwald Day on July 5.

The St John's Chapel, although only infrequently used at the whim of the Vicar of German except for the Summer meeting of Tynwald, was one of the first to be rebuilt at the time of Bishop Wilson's arrival in 1698.

His church took the form



The current Royal Chapel of St John the Baptist, showing the seating for Tynwald members Photo: Tynwald annual report

of an equal armed cross with a turret on the crossing. It was in part paid for by monies collected from the Members at the 1697 meeting of Tynwald.

Despite repairs in 1739, it was little more than an unroofed shelter for sheep by 1793, partly due to the Courthouses not being included in the properties which passed to the Crown

with Revestment and the St John's Chapel being viewed as a Courthouse rather than a church.

Repairs were started in 1793 but the building was soon under an interdict (church closing order) due to a suicide within the building.

Rebuilding was carried out in 1798 but, by 1814 when repairs were needed, it still had no seats or pews and

Bishop Murray supplied some at his own expense. More repairs in 1840 did not stop the rain coming through the roof, leading to the 1849 total rebuild with the walls finished externally in South Barrule granite.

The local architect, James Cowle, designed St Paul's in Foxdale where regular services had been held for the mining community since



'St Johns Church, as taken from the top of Slieauhallin Beg, on the day the church was taken down 19th July 1847' – taken from 'Records of Tynwald, Manx Society volume 19

1850 in the schoolroom known locally as the 'Mines Chapel'.

The foundation stone was laid in 1874 when special trains brought crowds from all over the island.

It opened for worship two years later but it was not consecrated until 1881 when the area it served was created a separate parish.

James Cowie was also responsible for St Catherine's Port Erin.

This Church was built with monies left by William Milner, locksmith and safemaker of Liverpool (commemorated by the tower on Bradda Head) in memory of his wife, Jane.

He requested it be dedicated to St Catherine which was the dedication of the Keeill and well at the foot of the broogh across the road. The church opened in 1880 but, by 1894 was too small for the summer congregations, so it was extended and a tower added.

The church hall, designed by Armitage Rigby, was added in 1902.

St German's Cathedral on St Patrick's Isle was also the parish church for German and officially named as such, despite being a ruin, until 1880.

The original Patrick Parish Church was also on St Patrick's Isle with the parish boundary dividing the island in two.

Up until the building of The Bulwark about 1750, to which the roadway was added in the 1880s, the Neb River entered the sea through the gap where Fenella Beach is now.

There was a sand bank, covered at high tide, between the end of the beach and

St Patrick's Isle. This made attendance at the parish church/cathedral extremely difficult and tide and time dependent.

To get over this, a chapel, St Peter's, was built in the town to serve the people of both parishes, parishioners from Patrick using the south aisle with the people of German on the north.

The decision to use this chapel is said to have been made when a coffin being taken across to St Patrick's Isle was swept away by the flooded river.

St Peter's is thought to have been built very early in the 15th Century and replaced about the middle of the next century.

Transepts had been added by the end of the 18th Century but an extensive alteration or re-build was carried out in 1816.

In 1872, a public clock was presented to the town by Hon. J.K. Ward of Montreal and a tower was added to the



The Clock Tower and window and walls of the former St Peter's Church in Peel Photo: Peter Killley



Holy Trinity church, Patrick

Photo: Jon Wornham



Foundation stone of new church tower, Peel

Photo: iMuseum

church to house it.

The earliest dated headstone in the graveyard was 1595, one of the earliest recorded in the island's burial grounds.

The Bishop Wilson Church at Patrick, built in 1714, became the Patrick Parish Church leaving St Peter's to serve as a Chapel of Ease for St German's, both Cathedral and Parish.

By 1875, the Patrick Parish Church had been declared to be unfit and a decision was made to build a new one on the same site.

Bishop Hill, however, had bought land at Glen Maye where he wished the new church to be built but this was rejected and the foundation stone for the new building was laid in April 1879 and it opened two years later.

However, because there was some lingering doubt about building a bigger parish church at Glen Maye, it was dedicated to All Saints instead of the parish patron, St Patrick.

The architect for Patrick Parish Church was Thomas D. Barry of Liverpool who also designed St Mary's Chapel at Port St Mary, the Presby-

terian Church in Ramsey, and the big new church then being built in Peel.

Bishop Hill had revived the scheme for a new church in Peel and a site was acquired in 1878. The same architects as for Patrick Parish Church, Thomas Barry, prepared the plans and the foundation stone was laid in 1879.

This was a period of great discussion about the need for a working cathedral for the island.

Some wanted the old cathedral restored, others wanted the new church to be the cathedral and if this happened, the Sanctuary was to be extended and a Chapter House provided. Others wanted the cathedral to be in Douglas, and the argument rumbled on for many years.

The new Peel church was opened and licensed during a visit by Archbishop Thomas of York, claimed to be the first visit to the Island by an Archbishop.

A reference by the Archbishop to the new church being 'a possible cathedral' received cheers from the people of Peel and silence from everyone else.

In 1885, it was offered as the Parish Church for German but the offer was declined as it would be 'too costly to maintain'.

In 1893, it was eventually dedicated as the Parish Church but St Peter's remained in use as a mission chapel until shortly before its demolition to a 'romantic ruin' in 1958.

The tower added in 1872,



The collegiate-style seating in the new chapel at King William's College

however, was left intact. In 1903, the roof of the new Parish Church blew in during a gale together with the West window.

These repairs were hardly complete when the foundations of the Tower and Spire were found to be inadequate and they were taken down. The Tower was rebuilt and the Spire stones kept for the time when that too could be restored. That, however, never happened and the stones were eventually sold.

In 1887, Bishop Bardsley had declared a 'New Cathedral too expensive a luxury' and, following the repairs to Bishopscourt after the fire of 1893, the chapel there,

dedicated to St Nicholas, was declared to be the pro-cathedral acting in place of a cathedral.

When St George's underwent a major restoration in 1909-1910, the semi-circular apse was extended by some eighteen feet and raised four feet above its former level and stalls provided for the Bishop, Archdeacon and the Canons.

King William's College, having opened in 1833, was very seriously damaged by fire in 1844 and rebuilt substantially in its original form. John Welch tells us that in the original build he had altered the design of the tower to the square structure we now see from the intended octagonal tower on a square base designed by his brother and Joseph Hansom.

This original style of tower was, however, used for Ballaugh Parish Church.

Initially, the Chapel, dedicated to St Thomas, occupied the whole of the 'leg' of the then overall 'T' shaped plan of the buildings.

In 1868, pressure of space saw this wing floored at half height with the Chapel upstairs, together with a new organ, and living accommodation below.

In 1879 a new detached chapel was designed by James Cowie and built by Flaxney Stowell of Castle-

town.

It has a collegiate layout and is the only chapel to have such an arrangement on the island.

In a collegiate layout, the seats face each other across a central aisle. In this case they are tiered up from the aisle with the clergy and staff stalls against the walls. The wall paintings in the Sanctuary area are of events in the life of St Thomas and are signed by C. C. Gray and dated 1901.

Following the building of the new chapel, the original chapel area was again redesigned including the relocation of the library and the provision of a museum.

A further redevelopment in 1937 saw the creation of the Barrovian Hall Dining Area, taking up the whole of the first floor of the original Chapel wing.

More recently, the organ in the present chapel was repositioned to a newly created gallery above the West door fronted with a section of the gallery rail salvaged from Loch Parade Methodist Church which was then in the course of demolition.

An organ which had previously been at King William's College and now in use at Crosby Methodist Chapel has graffiti on the rear of the organ case, presumably by a youthful 'organ blower':

'W.E. Gladstone M.P. Visited the school Oct. 2 1878'



The former King William's College Chapel organ, now enjoying a new life at Crosby Methodist Chapel

Photo: John Hall via Culture Vannin