

BUILDINGS AT RISK

Churches and chapels into the 20th century

Buildings at Risk covers buildings and structures – dwellings, commercial and civic – lost, at risk and saved. In this instalment, **Frank Cowin** of the Isle of Man Natural History & Antiquarian Society brings the story of the Manx Church and its buildings up to date.

The 20th Century opened with the building of one of the most architecturally important churches in the island, Our Lady, Star of the Sea and St Maughold in Ramsey.

Built to replace the converted warehouse, whose gable is still visible, it is a masterpiece of the architect's craft.

Designed by Giles Gilbert Scott, architect of Liverpool Anglican Cathedral, it stands demurely on its corner plot facing the sea, consequently on the wrong ecclesiastical axis, and internally is a simple frame to a riot of detail and colour.

By the 1930s, Jurby Church needed major repairs to roof, tower and walls.

The pre-Reformation Jurby Chalice was sold to the Trustees of the Manx Museum and the monies used to carry out the repairs.

The building was re-roofed, four feet of masonry removed from the top of the tower which was then re-capped, a new porch provided and new doors with painted glass panels provided.

Just as the work was completed the Second World War started and the nearby newly constructed RAF Airfield 'adopted' the church.

Some of those from the Station who died, usually in flying accidents, are buried side-by-side in the Burial Ground; young men from Australia and Canada, Holland and Poland, alongside those from the British Isles.

One accident on the airfield blew in the East Windows, fortunately not during service time.

Other repairs have been carried out in the years since,



Our Lady, Star of the Sea in Ramsey - an example of the early work of Sir Giles Gilbert Scott who went on to design the iconic red telephone box, Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral and Battersea Power Station

including the installation of the organ from Finch Hill Congregational Church, Douglas, when that closed.

The earliest mention of an organ in the Isle of Man is the description of a 'Rood Loft for organ' being in the Cathedral on St Patrick's Isle until

about 1651.

St George's, Douglas, bought an organ in Dublin and installed it in 1788.

It was used for organ recitals to raise money for the building fund.

Later stories, unsubstantiated, connect it with the

first performance of Handel's Messiah.

In 1791, St Mary de Bal-lure, Ramsey, ordered a large Psalmic or Barrel Organ fitted with music written by the organist of York Minster.

It was in the middle years of the 19th Century that organs became a popular feature of Manx Churches and, in particular, the Methodist Chapels.

1903 saw the need of an extra Roman Catholic church to serve the south of the island.

A disused mortuary and the adjoining building, formerly part of the Port Erin Marine Biological Station, situated just above the tide line on the North side of Port Erin Bay were acquired and converted.

In 1923, a new church dedicated to St Columba situated on the edge of the village was opened.

It was re-ordered in 1985

and again in 1996 following the addition of a hall three years' earlier. These buildings have provided a home for 'ecclesiastical salvage' from a number of sources across the island.

St Patrick's Roman Catholic Church, Peel, which was built in 1865, had a hall added in 1891 and a Presbytery in 1928, continues in use but now served by a priest from Douglas.

1932 saw the coming together of the Wesleyan, Primitive and United strands of Methodism.

The Uniting Conference held in the Albert Hall, London, was relayed to a large gathering in Victoria Street Church, Douglas, giving a hint of the growing importance of new technologies.

The United Methodists, in the form of the Methodist New Connexion, broke from the Wesleyans much earlier than the Primitives

but had only built one Chapel on the Island, in Derby Road, Douglas.

This church opened in 1889 and closed in 1914 and was sold becoming the hall for St Thomas' Church, more recently the Red Cross Hall and currently the practice room for the Manx Youth Band.

The New Connexion had three other meeting places one of which was the Hallelujah Hall, Ramsey, more recently the Manx Electricity Authority shop in Bowring Road.

The coming together of Methodism, in theory, brought to an end the need for the two by two distribution of chapels. In practice, however, very little happened until after the end of World War Two.

Since then, of the approximately 100 chapels in use in 1945, some 31 remain in use.

There are also regular ser-



Ramsey's Parliament Street Primitive Methodist Chapel in 1895, after the 'Big Snow'

Photo: iMuseum



Salvation Army Citadel, Lord Street, Douglas

vices at non-church premises, including the ecumenical 'Cat with no Tail'.

Some few Chapels have been demolished but most converted into other uses, principally dwellings. Some are immediately recognisable but others only when you know the backgrounds.

A few Anglican chapels have also become houses, including Oakhill, Cronk-y-Voddy and, most recently, Ballure.

Lezayre and Lonan churches have also a new lease of life with diversified uses.

St Thomas' Church having built a replacement hall in Park Road alongside the former Methodist New Connexion building on Derby Road, then later sold this.

It became a meeting place for the Elim Pentecostal Church who have since moved to a converted factory building in Onchan.

In Castletown, the Anglican St Mary's on The Parade was sold and converted into offices whilst the congregation worshipped the nearby Medieval St Mary's - The Old Grammar School.

A further move saw them convert the former National School into the present St Mary's on the Harbour which opened for worship in 1985.

The expansion of Douglas both immediately before and

after World War Two led to a number of 'Estate Chapels'; Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church (since demolished and replaced with dwellings) and the nearby Pulrose Methodist Chapel before the War (this was a fully multi-purpose building even including a purpose-designed projection room for films), St Joseph's Roman Catholic Church and, again, the nearby Willaston Methodist Chapel after the War, which has now been demolished as part of the redevelopment of the area of central Willaston.

St Joseph's, Willaston, was designed as a complete complex but only the Hall was built and that has been used until recently as a temporary church.

By this time, the internal design of Methodist and Church of England buildings were becoming very similar again and many Methodists of former years going into the former Willaston Chapel would undoubtedly have thought it to be Anglican until they explored further.

The alterations to the Methodist Churches were not only to other uses, but as at Peel, the removal of pews and the creation of other facilities by using the space under the rear of the balcony.

At Ramsey the large, former Wesleyan Waterloo Road Church was floored across at gallery level creating a very pleasant chapel area upstairs and, a rather less successful, hall below.

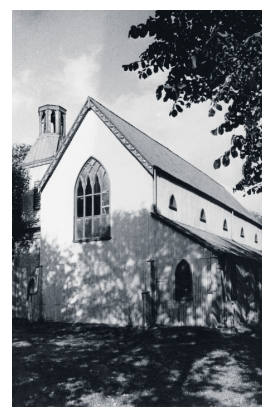
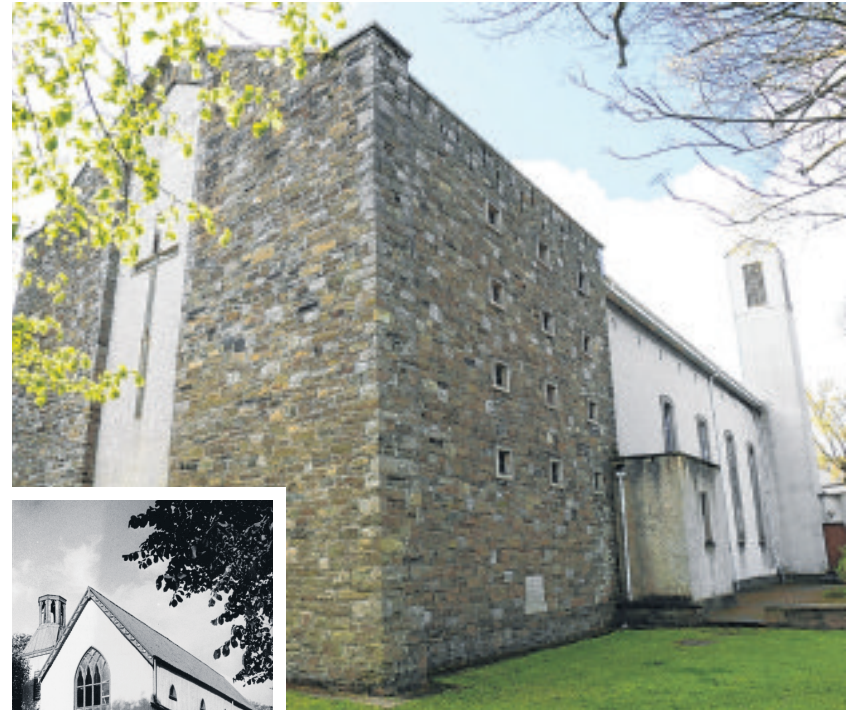
The provision of a lift ensured easy access for the congregation but not necessarily for funerals.

This building has now been sold and the congregation meet along with those of the former Holy Trinity United Reform Church in the St Paul's Church of England church hall.

Similar redevelopments for the Church of England saw the deteriorating hall at St Ninian's sold with much of its surrounding land for a housing development. The money from the sale was used to provide a mezzanine floor and necessary facilities at the West end of the Church.

By 1964, the 'Tin Tab', All Saints, Douglas, was in urgent need of replacement. All Saints was erected in 1898 as a temporary chapel when there was a need for a further Anglican chapel in Upper Douglas.

A site was given but, for legal reasons at the time, the freehold could not be transferred but only a lease created. Under Church of England rules, this meant that, whilst a permanent chapel could



All Saints' Church Douglas: the 1898 corrugated-iron clad 'Tin Tab (ernacle)' (left, iMuseum) and its 1967-2017 replacement (Culture Vannin)

not be built, a temporary one could.

As a result, a corrugated iron-clad prefabricated Church building was ordered from, and erected by, Mr JB Hawes, Iron Building Manufacturer of Deptford, London.

The replacement building, designed by CJ Kneen of Davidson, Marsh & Co, and consecrated in 1967, also broke new ground as its frame, including the columns, are of rectangular hollow section steel. This building has recently been sold.

Corrugated iron buildings were quite often used for small halls and reading rooms and All Saints was not the only one used for Church purposes. The forerunner of the recently closed Salisbury Street Methodist Chapel was one such building as was the Port-e-Vullen Mission, Maughold, and the Mission at Port Erin which was replaced by Victoria Square Methodist Chapel, now the Erin Arts Centre.

The original building for the Baptist Church on their Broadway, Douglas, site was also a similar building. Because the Baptist Church believes in adult, not infant, baptism their churches are designed with a pool that can accommodate total immersion of adults.

The number of Baptist connected meeting places and chapels on the Island is increasing, at times using

schools and other community buildings, and also building new as at Port St Mary on the site of the former Wesleyan Methodist Chapel.

When the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches combined to form the United Reform Church, their two Douglas properties in Finch Road and Finch Hill in Bucks Road, were sold and they purchased and converted what had been built as Cunningham House, the Headquarters for the Scout and Guide Movements in the island and situated adjoining St Ninian's Anglican Church.

The second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church in 1962-5 not only brought great changes in inter-Church relationships but also a 're-ordering' of Sanctuary areas and this has increasingly spread to other denominations.

The only church actually designed to this new thinking is St Anthony's Roman Catholic Church, Onchan, opened and dedicated by Archbishop Warlock in 1988, and is a striking modern design incorporating an etched glass window by local artist, Chris Spittal, giving the effect of Christ walking on the waters of Douglas Bay.

This new building replaced a timber framed building, originally a hut from the First World War Internment Camp at Knockaloe and sheeted externally with corrugated iron.

The nearby Lourdes Grotto was built for summer season open-air services whilst the figures alongside came from the Calvary Glen

which, for a while, occupied the slope down to Douglas Promenade nearer to Summerhill.

The Church of St German waited a long time before eventually becoming the Cathedral Church of the Diocese of Sodor and Man in 1980.

Since then, there has been an almost continuous programme of reordering and improvements providing amongst other things, a long overdue 'Treasury' - display cabinets to enable items of interest from around the Diocese to be exhibited.

A major scheme was the creation of a pilgrimage route in, and especially around, the Cathedral area. A series of reflective garden areas lead the pilgrim through, in a different way, the story that these articles have sought to tell.



Christ walking on the water, St Anthony's, Onchan



The first Marine Biological Station in Port Erin (highlighted) was re-used as a Catholic Church