

BUILDINGS AT RISK

Heritage: Our series of articles following decision by groups to join forces in bid to protect properties continues

A crowd funded, simple shelter

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It may appear a simple building compared to some in the Isle of Man, but the Peel Sailors' Shelter has had an interesting history.

Sited on Weatherglass Corner, where the promenade meets the harbour, it has always belonged to the people of the town. They paid for its construction with donations in the mid-1870s as a refuge for sailors from fishing and cargo vessels when stormy weather kept them shore-bound.

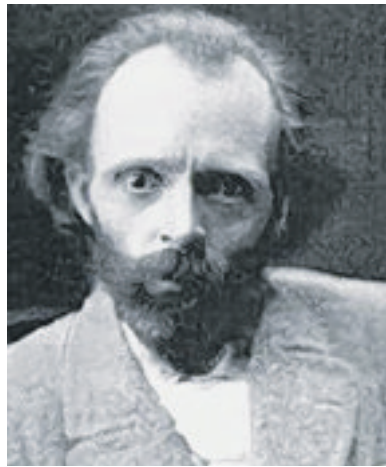
Entries in the shelter's first annual report for the year ending December 31, 1877, inform us that the idea for the building originated with the then High Bailiff of Peel, Robert John Moore, who held the office from 1853-84. A local builder, Mr Daniel Anderson, then undertook to construct the shelter – and he certainly did not delay. Records show that the first brick was laid on December 9, 1876, and the building was formally opened on January 12, 1877 – just 34 days later, and all for the princely sum of £172 17s 2 1/2d.

Although a fairly simple building it has always proudly sported the three legs of Mann emblem on its gable frontage – although facing the other way to the direction more usual today.

The first annual report mentions that the first caretaker was a Mr Thomas Killey, himself an old seaman, who 'is always at his post, keeps the room in thorough good order and scrupulously clean, and is civil and attentive to all'.

To use the shelter, sailors were required to pay a membership fee of one shilling a quarter – payable in advance – and in return they could avail themselves of a roof over their heads with free lighting and heating provided, and where they could pass their time in port in the company of like-minded souls or perhaps read the local papers placed there.

Part of the reason for



Head shots of Hall Caine (left,) and T.E. Brown, (right,). both are recorded as being speakers at a special supper event held for Peel's old people over the age of 60 in the shelter in January 1894 - an account of what went on was given in full in the Westminster Gazette!

providing them with the shelter was a temperance movement-inspired motive of keeping sailors out of the town's pubs and so avoiding problems associated with drunkenness. The hope was that in the Sailors' Shelter they could talk, debate or enjoy a game of cards or draughts without there being any rowdiness.

At other times the building was used as an amenity hall for the local population at large. Concerts were held there and other aspirations towards gentility can be found in a late-19th century newspaper advert which informs us:

'THE ART CLASS will be resumed at the Seaman's Shelter, Peel, on Thursday, October 20, at 7 o'clock. The Subjects taught will consist of Freehand, model, Perspective, Geometry, Shading from models and the Cast, Painting in Water Colours and in Oils, Architecture, Building, Construction, &c. The Class will meet from 7 to 8-30pm, on the evenings of Thursday and Saturday. Any further information may be obtained from the Secretary, or the master, Mr D M Robertson, School of Art, Douglas.

'EDWARD T CHRISTIAN, Hon Sec.'

However, other newspaper reports indicate

that a much more jovial occasion was held in the shelter on January 13, 1894 – with two island literary celebrities taking part. The Manx newspapers reported:

'On Friday night week, Mr Hall Caine, the celebrated novelist, author of "The Bondman", "Son of Hagar", "The Deemster" &c entertained at supper a number of old people of Peel and district, the qualification being that the guests should be at least sixty years of age. About seventy sat down in the Fisherman's (sic) Shelter. Mr Lucas was the caterer and provided an excellent menu, to which ample justice was done.

Mr W Cashin presided, and there assisted at the tables Messrs J Morrison, R Boyde, and J Quarrie. Mrs Hall Caine endeared herself to all by her good fellowship and geniality.

'The tables having been cleared, a number of those present gave songs in Manx and English, and speeches. The only "outsider" present was the Rev T E Brown who helped to make the evening pleasant by his usual amusing stories.

'The meeting was brought to a close at about ten o'clock by the singing of "Rule Britannia", and by the giving of three cheers for Mr Hall Caine. The evening will be long remembered among the

old people.'

It was a mark of Hall Caine's books success at the time – he would publish the novel *The Manxman*, giving a further boost to the island's tourism, later that year – that this entertainment for Peel's elderly was also reported in the Westminster Gazette:

'Mr Hall Caine entertained nearly 100 old Manx people to dinner on Old Christmas Day at the Fishermen's Refuge (sic) in Peel. It was an extraordinary gathering. Almost 20 were over eighty, and some over ninety. Nearly everyone present spoke Manx. By far the largest portion had never left the Island, except in the fishing boats, and some had never set foot in a railway train. Only two or three had ever been in a theatre.

'There were Christmas carvals (carols), the old Manx songs "Mylechrane", "Ellan Vannin" and "Hunt the Wren". Then a Manx jig by old women. Finally a speech from the host, whose uprising was the signal for hearty cheering.'

Since those heady days, the world has changed around Peel Sailors' Shelter and although it has now stood for more than 130 years there were fears last decade that it might be lost. In August 2009 The Manx Independent reported: 'The Sailors' Shelter in Peel is on a site earmarked for redevelopment. The Department of Transport,



which owns the building, has not ruled out the possibility that in the future it will want to do something with it. But there were no firm plans, the department's director of properties Rodney Christopher confirmed. The shelter was built on DoT land and it's there under a lease, which expired a long time ago. The Sailors' Shelter Committee has been offered a new lease and the DoT is getting that prepared to be sent to the committee for comment.'

Fortunately the shelter and nearby Harbour Master's Building are still standing. The Sailors' Shelter Committee has so far been able to secure an annual lease on the building and three years ago, aware of the Sailors' Shelter's history, Peel Heritage Trust paid for its front wall to be re-rendered and for its roof to be retiled and rebattened. The Peel Commissioners also provided materials for the revamp.

The shelter committee is now run by volunteers not as a charity but as a

friendly society and people are welcome to use the building provided they make donations towards its upkeep and to cover the costs of heating and lighting. As a result it has become a real hit, used for events ranging from art exhibitions to dance classes and film shows. Committee member Bill Quine says it now regularly sees use four or five days a week and can also be hired as a venue for children's parties or its facilities can provide a useful restroom or changing area for disabled groups visiting the town.

In July and August last year it was an appropriate base for Peel's Traditional Boat Weekend, and towards the end of the year Santa found it made a very comfortable grotto in which to receive children's present requests. It hosted a family Christmas carol concert too.

However, despite the renewed popularity of the building, Bill fears that a potential 'sword of Damocles' still hangs over the Peel Sailors' Shelter



Opinion

A transparent and open Building Registration system?

WRITTEN BY

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We have recently seen how the Building Registration system has been discredited by apparent manipulation to suit Government aims at Port St. Mary railway station, but this uncertainty and lack of clarity doesn't just concern Port St. Mary Station.

One of the principal problems is lack of access to existing information in relation to Building Registration.

Over recent years there has been much excellent work by the Planning and Building Control Directorate making planning applications (and applications for consent to works on Registered Buildings) visible to the public via the gov.im website. Similar publication by the Directorate also provided a welcome and important opportunity for public scrutiny and comment on the current application to de-Register Lorne House in Castletown

However, Registered Building proposals now need the same degree of public visibility.

The Registered Buildings section of www.gov.im currently contains a list of 18 buildings/

groups which the Planning and Building Control Directorate acknowledge as having been formally proposed for Registration. Most of these are just a name, only two of the eighteen having any published backup information. The list doesn't even show the date on which the Registration Proposal was lodged, and it would appear some may have been on the list for approaching ten years.

Open publication of Registration proposal information, as has been the case for any planning application in recent years, would allow insight into and confidence in the process.

A file exists and is made publically available for every planning application which is lodged, irrespective of its outcome, and all documents are added to that file and made public (online and at the counter) as consideration continues ...

Registration proposals which are successful do result in a file containing proposals, assessments etc. which is published on line BUT in most cases that publication only occurs AFTER a successful registration proposal. Whilst a Registration proposal is being considered, or if a proposal stalls or fails, there is no or negligible publication, so the public cannot see what is going on or why.

Planning applications which are refused are still made public, together with the reasons supporting that decision - it appears Registered Building proposals which are declined are not.

It should not need Freedom of Information style requests for members of the public to gain access to stalled or failed Registered Building proposals. In our view the highly-successful and proven access to Planning applications should be extended to all Registered Building proposals, so members of the public can understand what is (or isn't) happening and why, and help rebuild confidence in the Registered Buildings system.

because of the terms of its lease. Although owned by the people of Peel, the building stands on Isle of Man Government land.

The committee only needs to pay a penny a year for renewal of its lease, but that lease has to be renewed annually, meaning that there is an implied threat that the land may be turned to another use at some time in the future.

What Bill and other committee members would like is for the Peel Sailors' Shelter to be put on a more secure footing, as it were, with a longer-term lease ensuring a greater degree of permanence for its long-term future.

Perhaps the Government, in its current tendency to allow development over the interests of conservation, should heed the reported words of Hall Caine (a member of the 'Anti-Scrape Society', the forerunner of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings) in that speech he made in Peel Sailors' Shelter in 1894: 'He was a

great believer in things old - old books, old pictures, old houses.... Perhaps the tendency of these days was to pay too much attention to the young and the new. Both are worthy of respect, but they were liable to overstate their importance. They were in danger of talking as if wisdom began with them, and their fathers were simpletons...'

Part of the magic of the Isle of Man is its surviving structures from many different eras which help to bring its history to life.

'They must not be allowed to be lost to sweeping mod-

ernisation and development through a lack of planning controls and regard for conservation.



Peel
Sailors' Shelter
as it is today