

BUILDINGS AT RISK

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

Farming formed the basis of the way we Manx live our lives today

Looking back to how simple homesteads turned in time into what we recognise as modern idea of farms and how agriculture grew on the Isle

Feature

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The Manx landscape has been cultivated for centuries, with its people principally living in scattered farmsteads and only in comparatively recent times in towns and villages. Traditionally, the Manx relied on keeping their sheep and cattle on common land in the summer and providing them with minimum shelter close to the homestead in winter.

A pigsty and a small dairy might be found close to, or attached to, a house and with the horse, the most important animal due to its field and haulage work, often having a stable better-built than the house itself. Scattered throughout the island are tholtans, such as Keeillabregga above the Sulby Valley, while the preserved thatched buildings of Karran's Croft at Cregneash represent the basic form of housing used both for humans and animals.

Sometimes the house, cow house and barn were all attached in a range, as formerly seen at Port Mooar and East Loughin; or a house was attached to a two-storey barn with a hayloft above and a combined stables/cowhouse underneath, as at Close Leece. Most are now demolished or greatly altered beyond recognition. Shelter and water supply were key factors in the siting of buildings. The roof of a 'tholtan' had its eaves parallel to, and at the same height as, the break of slope in the land to the rear. Bank barns, as at The Creggans, had supporting cross stones between the building and the bank behind, but a gap between the two still enabled drainage from the bank to be kept clear of the built structure, whose layers of stones were laid downwards and graduating outwards so water drained away from the building.



Upper Howe

As farming regimes became more controlled, open fields were enclosed and mountain commonland was reduced, leading to overgrazing producing poorer-quality stock. With the better incomes from the running trade, by the end of the 18th century farming was in a poor state. However, trade – both legal and illicit – gradually led to ideas reaching the island on the improvement of agriculture. Influential was John Christian Curwen, descended from the Milntown Christians and the only person to be both an MP and an MHK. He built a model farm, Schoose in Cumberland, and encouraged the production of potatoes, turnips, wheat and barley. Thanks to him,

a branch of the Workington Agricultural Society was formed in the island and competitions were run for the best stock and crops. But to produce better crops and not have fields wrecked over winter required animals to be kept indoors, and large quantities of manure, as well as lime, to be spread evenly across the fields. Constructed of local materials, the ranges of farm buildings found throughout the island developed and the farm 'street', as at Ballakilmartin, was born. Usually with a slight slope to allow for gravity drainage, the typical range had stables at the highest end, calf shed in the middle and cattle buildings at the bottom,

'Most are now demolished or greatly altered beyond recognition...'

Contrast of buildings at Smeale

all draining into a central midden, the product of which was dried before being spread on the fields. Larger lowland farms responded to the demand for corn during the Napoleonic Wars and extensive ranges of stables and cowsheds, overtopped with hay barns, were constructed for the animals supplying both manure and motive power. Grain had to be threshed before being passed on to mills for grinding. From circular horsewalks, waterwheels, static steam engine flues and windmills to moving threshing machines, further features of farms evolved. In 1833, Caesar Bacon had a new form of waterpower, a

turbine to drive machinery, constructed at Staward, near the former Royal Manx showground. A windmill tower, unaltered from its original purpose, survives at Ballawhane but most have been used to extend homes, as at East Loughan, Balladoole Granary, Windmill House and The Witches Mill, Castletown. When cheaper corn was imported from overseas, farmers had to concentrate on producing meat. During the latter half of the 19th century, extensive ranges of buildings grew up, forming initially an L-shape, then a U and finally a courtyard. These provided not only a central midden area, but also a layout for impounding loose cattle. Knockaloe

Mooar, Upper Howe, Nunnery Howe, Balladoole, Ballakillingan and The Whitehouse are examples. Most of the buildings face inwards, with occasional doors through which crops were passed from carts into lofted storage areas on the outside curtain wall. In the early 1900s, some 'model' farms were built from scratch. Thomas Walker gradually acquired lands around Maughold and The Barony farm was built. Ballahowin in the 1900s and Ellerslie, remodelled during the Great War – whose owner, Joseph Cunningham, of holiday camp fame, utilised internees for his workforce – both incorporated tramways for the removal of manure to pits for recycling.



Wallberry approach



Architecture enthusiasts visit Smeale and are pictured in front of a middle farmhouse, now a store



Ballahowin



Farming heritage

FARM FOCUS

Some worthy of note are:
1. Ballakilmartin: Located on the outskirts of Onchan, its iconic farm 'street' now – courtesy of its former owner, the late Examiner farming correspondent Harvey Briggs and his wife Laura – forms part of a circular network of public footpaths, including Bibaloe Glen. Ballakilmartin has possible 17th and 18th century buildings on one side and mid-19th century ones on the other, but the farm has recently been sold and the future of the buildings currently not used and not protected is unknown.
2. Smeale: From plough to plate, Chris, Steven and

Beth Martin have developed a unique link between the produce of their farm and the serving of it to diners visiting their former 16th-century farmhouse. Martins have been recorded at Smeale since the initial Manorial Rolls and the farmyard now contains two former farmhouses and the current one, which dates from 1825. A circular farm trail, showing how the farm is sensitively managed around the ecology of the area, is periodically opened to the public and exhibitions are held demonstrating how the wheat from their farm is used.
3. Knockaloe Mooar: Once a very large grain-growing

farm encompassing Patrick village, The Creggans and Shenvalley farms, it passed through several generations of Radcliffes, who gave land for the church and, as a result, became tithe free. Later owners were the Parrs, who owned a brewery in Peel, and the Quirks, who gradually developed its fine ranges of buildings. Possibly unique is a tall standalone chimney used in connection with a static form of steam power to drive a threshing machine. In 1868 debts forced its sale to Robert Corrin, a member of the Knockaloe Beg family involved in net manufacturing for the fishing industry.

During the 1900s the flat land was used for annual military camps, probably leading to its continuing use of the new-built mart and store for the Royal Manx Show.
4. Carnanes Estate: The estate was developed by the Taubmann family of the Nunnery and contains three substantial groups of farm buildings. The Whipp family have successfully established three totally different tenancies and building uses on each. Upper Howe is a working organic farm under Adam Kelly but with some of the older buildings still struggling to find a use. Nunnery Howe,

its future is unknown, with the Government seeking a tenant and allowing only for the continuing use of the new-built mart and store for the Royal Manx Show.
5. Carnanes Estate: The estate was developed by the Taubmann family of the Nunnery and contains three substantial groups of farm buildings. The Whipp family have successfully established three totally different tenancies and building uses on each. Upper Howe is a working organic farm under Adam Kelly but with some of the older buildings still struggling to find a use. Nunnery Howe,

the most visible of the three, has been converted to a residential centre for autism, and Wallberry's courtyard of buildings now accommodates a community farm run by the Children's Centre. As farming is an evolving industry and amalgamation of units will continue to result in redundant steadings, it is essential to help and encourage landowners to find alternative uses for their farm buildings as inherent components of our island. Many do not have public access, but that should not prevent us from respecting the positive contribution they make to the Manxness of the landscape.

Opinion

Record, reuse – additional use?

WRITTEN BY

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Built with the knowledge and optimism of their day, farmstead buildings represent an age when agriculture was supreme, adapting to new ideas but utilising local design, materials and labour. They are Manx to the core.

Farms comprise some of the most numerous island buildings; although most of the current generation have never lived or worked on a farm, these buildings deserve recognition for what they represent and should be recorded. But how?

Most farmsteads have evolved over many years, even centuries and formal plans are non-existent. We need to record them – their layout and use, what they are built of and features: datestones or dated beams are gold-dust, horse-walks, threshing barns, waterwheels, dairies, cowstalls, pigeon holes, shutes for lowering crops into a store and hinged panels to allow the interiors to be swept out. Also important is the colour of their woodwork – it may be a reflection of what was left over from the latest repainting of Steam Packet boats or Water Board buildings!

For all that, for the local historian or family history researcher it may mean a lot to know what has been there in the past – so a record, photographic, written or drawn, is essential. A cowhouse on Farm A may

be very similar to that on Farm B, but a historian will really want to know exactly what was on both farms!

But for farmers, what use are these buildings now, either to farming or other purposes? Their narrow entrances reflect the past use of manual labour, and their low ceiling height the old lack of machinery and vehicles. Some farmers have converted their ranges to residential or tourist use, as at Cammal, Thalloo Queen and Ballahowin, providing a much-needed additional source of income while maintaining farm buildings' traditional landscape setting.

For others, however, difficulties of access, the proximity of newer working farm buildings and middens makes this impossible and their use is restricted to purposes like calf and lamb rearing.

While the attractiveness of the older buildings is appreciated, the cost of maintaining them is often not.

Milntown's stable courtyard now fronts a complex of small business enterprises, and at Ellerslie, Penti Christian has established his rape seed oil production, although this takes up only a small part of buildings constructed to house a huge dairy herd. Horses were for centuries a farm's most important animal and though now mainly used for recreation they can, as at GGH's Ballacallin, still be accommodated in the original, purpose-built accommodation designed for them.