

BUILDINGS AT RISK

Planning: Six acres of Georgian Douglas in the spotlight

Let's protect what remains of quay's character and history

A decision made in 1890 by the Victorian Town Commissioners has cast a long-lasting shadow

Feature

By **PETER KELLY**
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A drip of water can do little harm, but a constant drip can wear away a stone.

The same applies to the buildings of towns or villages. Demolish one old building and it's probably not noticed, but continue to demolish buildings and one day you will wake up and they will all be gone. Douglas could well have looked a different place if the Victorian Town Commissioners hadn't swept away six acres of Georgian Douglas in the 1890s.

Forty years later, their successors, Douglas Corporation, finished the job and created the island's largest car park when very few had cars.

Then, in the late 1950s, when the introduction of the Mini saw more and more cars on the road, they got rid of the car park and created a bus station. Now that too has gone. All this has left us bereft of the old buildings that make so many of the picturesque Cornish seaside villages and towns so popular.

Douglas and the island has relied on ships and the sea to bring us the necessities of life and at one time the harbourside was a hive of industry as boats discharged their cargoes, often into warehouses or timber yards very close at hand. In so many popular seaside towns in the UK, those warehouses have been converted into apartments, as has happened in Castletown, Peel, Port St Mary and Ramsey, but not Douglas. True, there has been an upturn in the vibrance of North Quay, with more and more restaurants vying for business, but those sitting at the continental-style outdoor seating areas look at what? Tyre and exhaust garages, empty 1930s



Quines Corner, named after Sam Quine, where it meets North Quay. Between the masts of the ship are two warehouse buildings. The one on the right was Riley's while the one on the left is actually standing in Big Well Street



South Quay in the 1930s just prior to the demolition of the Red Herring Houses of the 1760s. The six storey warehouse on the left survived until the 1960s and was another Corlett, Sons and Cowley building

warehouses, vacant plots, a former gasworks, two bland office blocks and a builders' merchant. Ironically, when the 'Douglas Plan' was introduced by the planners, it dictated that future development around the harbour should be

restricted to businesses related to the marine environment in some way, but what went wrong? The drip, drip syndrome has continued around the Douglas quayside. Just a few years ago, there was a planning application to convert

Riley's warehouse at Quine's Corner into holiday apartments. A move in the right direction for a building of 1820s vintage, built to withstand the great weight of sacks of flour. After

planning approval was granted, the engineer's report came to light giving reasons why the building couldn't withstand the conversion and so a new building on a supposed 'lookalike' principle was

erected, but that patina of old buildings is sadly missing in the outcome. At the end of the North Quay was Clinch's Brewery which bore the owner's name from 1868, but the brewery had occupied the site since 1779. Mr Clinch modernised the business by the installation

'At the end of North Quay was Clinch's Brewery'

Opinion

Registered building process has no focus

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For virtually all his political days, Peter Karran has pushed for the registered building process to be taken away from the hands of the planners and given to an independent body.

Sadly his proposals always fell on deaf ears. The 'vested interest' syndrome has been more than apparent over the years when considering the time it took to have certain government-owned buildings registered.

Something of that nature has continued to this day with the Port St Mary Railway Station buildings.

Of recent times, the failure of the Department of Infrastructure to register the nationally important Old Drill Hall at a time when it was for sale by government was matched, if not crowned, by Minister Ronan's refusal to register The Nunnery, just after it had been sold, because 'it wasn't in danger of demolition'.

That was hardly a valid or balanced reason, given the report especially commissioned by government strongly recommended its registration.

At the last sitting of Tynwald, Policy and Reform Minister John Shimmin presented a Strategic Review with regard to the future of planning on the island.

The report suggested streamlining the planning system in many ways, including creating a single consent for both planning and heritage – quite unlike the present system, where separate registered building consent is meant to be a safeguard. Equally, it is suggested that third party appeals be removed, so even adjoining owners could be unable to seek appeal over a neighbour's planning application.

It appears like another case of taking the public out of the planning process.

Even those buildings that are registered don't seem to have the protection afforded to them.

Take, for instance, The Red House, designed by Baillie Scott, the internationally-known architect, for himself on Victoria Road, Douglas.

The planning committee turned down an application to double its size, but when it was taken to appeal by the owner, the officers who were meant to defend the decision of the committee presented the case for approval and it was approved.

Diane Haigh, the renowned expert on Baillie Scott, has commented that now its worldwide historical importance is zero.

Neither have all the buildings on the register been properly registered. Take, for instance, the Swing Bridge control building on South Quay – only the centre part of the building is registered and not the integral side wings.

The registration of the Castle Mona does not include the east wing, which was part of the original building. The certificate of registration

'Only the centre part of the building is registered'

excludes the row of Victorian shops in front of the hotel, but the red line on the accompanying map includes them.

The 'model farm' at Ellerslie, Crosby only covers part of the complex, certainly excluding the only true Dutch Barn in the island and possibly the iconic silo as well.

Bridge House in Castletown doesn't have an identifying plan with its registration, leaving it to chance as to which part is registered and which is not.

Equally, Douglas Railway Station registration doesn't have a plan, just the words Douglas Railway Station – but where does that start and end? Currently there is public discontent over the absence of both a conservation officer and grant funding.

As recent as June of this year the owner of one registered building applied for de-registration, claiming: 'The whole building and architectural heritage conservation is a sham with no contribution from government.'

Who can argue with that?



The Newson's buildings at a time when they were occupied by the Laxey Glen and Foxdale Stores Company. The smaller building on the right is the Liver public house which is now part of the same building. Behind that is the Saddle Hotel



The Old Custom House is the name above the door of the six storey warehouse standing proud above its neighbours. It was later the home of Corlett, Sons and Cowley, the agricultural merchants who had several premises on both North and South Quay



South Quay near to the swing bridge. The buildings in the centre were the earliest to be built on that side of the river and date from the 1760s



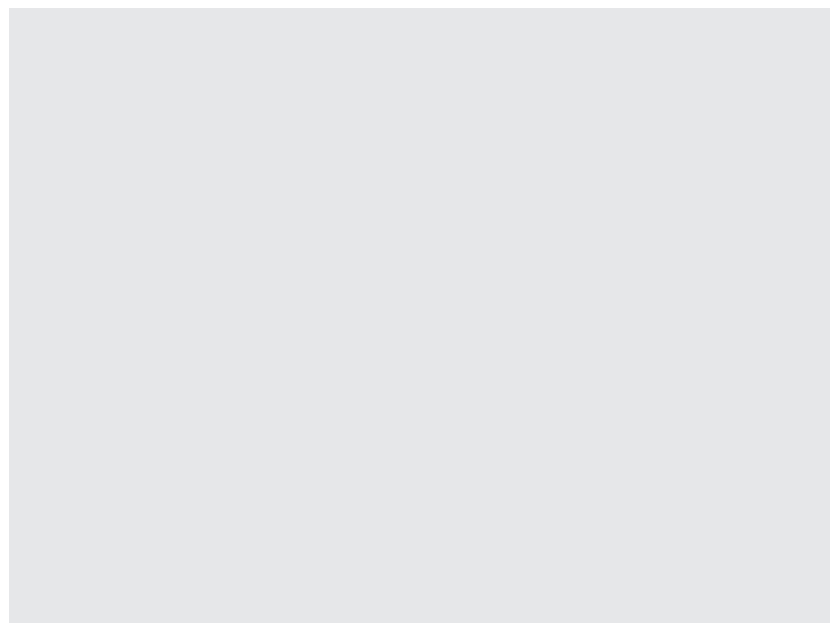
South Quay in the 1930s showing houses built for genteel folk between 1790 and about 1810. Many were occupied by retired military officers on half pay. Until the building of Athol Street this was the fashionable part of Douglas in which to live. One by one they have gone. Now there are only two

'The Liver'. Years later, it became a newsagent run by 'Putty Nose' Cubbon, a character known for his call 'Big boat in the bay'. This complex of buildings is undoubtedly of significance to our architectural heritage and falls into that category of 'Buildings at Risk' due to its

uncertain future. Another building which, although registered, falls into a similar category is the Control Tower to the former Swing Bridge on South Quay. It belongs to government, but is surplus to requirements and although it was offered to Douglas Corporation they

declined to take it, given the estimated cost of their scheme for the building. All the working parts are still there and it was a popular venue when included in the Manx National Heritage's open days scheme a couple of years ago. It's surprising how popular

Victorian water pumping stations have become across England. Surely all it takes is a little bit of imagination and a liberal application of political will to create another attraction for the niche market of transport and heritage-related visitors.



History

Missing details on Douglas quayside

Historian Peter Kelly wrote an article in last week's Examiner as part of the Buildings At Risk series.

His contribution focussed on the area around Douglas quayside.

Unfortunately, a production error led to a section of the text in the middle of the piece to be left out. What follows is the missing text.

At the end of the North Quay was Clinch's Brewery which bore the owner's name from 1868, but the brewery had occupied the site since 1779.

Mr Clinch modernised the business by the installation of a steam plant that powered hoists and water pumps as well as being part of the brewing process.

This necessitated the construction of the 'tower' building that stands on the site to this day with its integral chimney from the boiler. Strange,

but the planners decided to register this late 1860s Victorian building, rather than those buildings on site which were the only examples left on the island of a Georgian brewery.

Three-quarters of the way along North Quay was the Corlett, Sons and Cowley's shop and warehouse building.

It was at one time HM Customs House, having a balcony on the front elevation at first-floor level, where the officers could observe the comings and goings of all shipping.

The Customs moved closer to the mouth of the harbour and the property was occupied by several different tenants until around 1887. Then it was rebuilt as a six-storey warehouse.

The front facade was retained when a large office block was constructed on the site of recent, but the dramatic effect of the original building standing proud above its

neighbours has been lost due to the new offices being the same height.

There is now only one old warehouse left, but will we wake up and find that too has gone? It is the premises of the Newson Trading Company, the site of which was sold to Edward Forbes, the grandfather of the famous biologist of the same name, as a walled garden in 1789. It was he who built the warehouse which was sold on in 1833.

The family bank, Wulff and Forbes, occupied the ground floor of the property two doors away in what is currently the shop for Newson's. The end-piece of the building at the junction with Queen Street was erected as a house around the same time and for a while was a public house called 'The Liver'. Years later, it became a newsagent run by 'Putty Nose' Cubbon, a character known for his call 'Big boat in the bay'.



Clinch's Brewery in the early years of the twentieth century. Fresh water for the brewing process was obtained on the Artesian Well principle. The original Georgian brewery buildings were in the yard at the rear nestling under the embankment supporting Big Well Street, later to become Lord Street.