

# BUILDINGS AT RISK

Transport: With Tynwald set to debate the future of Douglas's horse trams this week, Peter Kelly offers his views



The Sea Terminal was opened in 1965 bringing modern facilities to sea travellers. Note how the tram lines link up with the new building with a new shelter designed by Stan Basnett. King Car saw to its removal and replacement with a car park

## Government must follow its own rules over horse trams

By PETER KELLY  
Isle of Man Victorian Society

**Up to now, this series has been devoted to buildings, but today it looks at a different piece of our heritage that has to be similarly regarded as 'at risk'.**

At the July sitting of Tynwald, a last minute amendment by Bill Malarkey secured a resolution that 'a new single line tramway track should be laid from Derby Castle to the Sea Terminal'.

On December 13, the question of the future of the horse trams was back on the agenda and several members asked: 'What has changed in six months?'

The answer was quite simple. A report was prepared and circulated which showed all the hallmarks of having been written by Hans Christian Andersen on the lines of 'The Emperor's New Clothes'.

It was also in defiant mood as regards the July Tynwald resolution: 'The department does not believe that there is any operational or economic benefit in operating the tramway the whole length of the promenade. If the section to the south of the war memorial were built it would be used but infrequently'.

One has to ask why would it be used infrequently?

Several members mentioned that figures were not available as to this year's operations, simply because details of where people got on or off were not recorded. This obviously brought into question how could it be categorically said that there was not any operational or economic benefit in running the full length of the promenade.

In his summing up, Infrastructure Minister Ray Harmer managed to quote figures that others were told didn't exist. He said approximately



Tramlines curving around the Peveril Hotel and capable of being extended to integrate with the steam railway at the end of North Quay. It was intended that there would be a loop line returning via Athol Street and Victoria Street

65 per cent of the passengers got on at the Derby Castle end and 35 per cent at the Sea Terminal. At that rate, it could be argued that only 35 per cent would take advantage of the souvenir shop (for which a planning application has not been made) and 65 per cent could enjoy the facilities of Costa in the Sea Terminal.

Twice reference is made to a single track not complying with the requirements of the Office of Rail and Road, yet a simple phone call to them revealed that they do not have any statutory right over the Isle of Man and advised that the Isle of Man had its own inspectors.

There was confusion in the Court as to where the tramway will start and finish.

The motion refers to re-laying the double track from Broadway, which is a major road junction, but doesn't refer to any other new lines south of Broadway. Some

members made reference to a termination at the War Memorial and others referred to a Cultural Quarter in front of The Gaiety and Sefton.

Strange, as the Cultural Quarter was part of a planning application that was withdrawn. It was to have been a paved area with a 3D map of the island made out of the ubiquitous imported granite and a granite carving of a TT sidecar for people to sit in and be photographed. Which bit of 'culture' is that?

That scheme also incorporated a road roundabout which turned the traffic on to the present line of the horse tram tracks because there was not going to be any. None of this has the benefit of planning approval, yet members have been convinced this is the way forward.

Again, in summing up, Mr Harmer made reference to the proposal of leaving a 'tram corridor' to facilitate extending



Integrated transport from the earliest of days with the horse tram traveling on to the Victoria Pier to collect passengers. Later the pier was extended and what was known as 'the triangle' filled in and the Pier Arcade built



In 1896 the San Francisco style cable car integrated with the horse tram to take passengers to the upper part of the expanding town and initially returned back to the promenade at Broadway. Later it was curtailed at Stanley View as the final gradient was too hairy

the horse trams, back to the Sea Terminal.

He said: 'A tram corridor is actually where you lay concrete. So it's not a case of having to come back and do all that work. The tracks have been set in concrete. Obviously, initially, you tarmac that over, and then you can remove the tarmac relatively easily and put the tracks there.'

That doesn't quite make it clear if you are burying the track for the time being or whether you lay it later – it seems to say both. If the track is laid, then where is the saving of £750,000?

There were also those who queried why this matter should be debated again and others said it was a new house and they had every right to do so.

What was interesting was that, throughout the debate, no mention was made of The Isle of Man Strategic Plan which was approved by Tynwald as recent as March 15, 2016. It came into operation on April 1, 2016. All Fools Day or not, it could be described as the rules under which not only the Planning Committee but



Also in 1896 the horse trams and electric trams integrated at Derby Castle where an ornamental, but effective canopy was built to facilitate passenger transfer. Major Pollack's Strathallan Lodge became the Strathallan Hotel to offer refreshments to passengers

all departments have to work.

There are recommendations and there are policies.

Transport Policy 3 clearly states: 'New development on or around existing and former railway routes should not compromise their attraction as a tourist or leisure facility, or their potential as public transport routes or cycle/leisure footpath routes.'

Elsewhere in the Strategic Plan it states that government has 'the object to promote an

integrated transport strategy to meet the needs of the local community and visitors'.

Does the axing of the tramway from the Sea Terminal to some unspecified point between The Sefton and Broadway improve integrated transport and does it compromise the attraction of a tourist facility?

The answer should be patently obvious, but will Tynwald ignore its own policies while others can't?



Thomas Lightfoot in a photograph he gave to each one of his children

## Biography: Thomas Lightfoot

Thomas Lightfoot was one of those self-made men who started his working life as a labourer on the English railways, moving on to become a platelayer, then a railway contractor and as such he built the horse tramway in Sheffield in 1873.

At the age of 61, in 1875, he retired to the Isle of Man and took up residence in a large house on what was two decades later called Queen's Promenade.

At that time, work was proceeding at the other end of the bay with the construction of Loch Promenade and Lightfoot saw the potential for a tramway which had been mooted four years earlier. To do so necessitated the passing of the Douglas Bay Tramway Act of 1876, which received Royal Assent on 12th August.

He didn't wait for such formalities and just cracked on. The tramway opened without recorded ceremony on August 7.

The line ran from the bottom of what is now Summer Hill to the lifeboat house just beyond the Iron Pier, awaiting the completion of the roadway on Loch Promenade.

When that time came, the line curved around the lifeboat house (later replaced by 'The Shelter') and terminated at the end of the new Queen Victoria Pier, with a passing loop opposite the side of the Peveril Hotel to facilitate the return journey.

The venture was a success, but Lightfoot could never be still and took on the completion of the bankrupt Grand Hotel, Theatre and Aquarium Complex at the bottom of Victoria Street.

To facilitate this, in 1882 he sold the tramway to the Isle of Man Tramway Co Ltd, of which he became a director.

The new company increased the rolling stock, sought permission to put in additional passing places along the promenade as it was a single track line and had the master plan of extending the tramway to the steam railway station, thus linking the boat with the rest of the island as well as Douglas promenade.

In 1893, an electric tramway was created from Derby Castle to Groulle by the Douglas and Laxey Coast Electric Tramway Compa-

ny which, in 1894, changed its name to the Isle of Man Tramways and Electric Power Company.

The same year, it bought the horse trams and took a 21-year lease from Douglas Town Commissioners of the land on which the track was laid.

The company also embarked on the creation of a cable car system that ran from the Jubilee Clock, around the upper part of Douglas and initially back down to Broadway, thus integrating with the horse trams which were extended along Strathallan Crescent to meet the electric trams. An integrated passenger service under one ownership and control.

The collapse of Dumbell's Bank in 1900 saw the demise of the tram company which was put into liquidation.

Douglas Corporation agreed to buy the horse trams and the cable car and the formal takeover was on January 2, 1902, in a ceremony conducted on the top deck of a tram at the Jubilee Clock with a cable car alongside; the event was photographically recorded by Mr Keig.