

# BUILDINGS AT RISK

Pools: Contributors cover buildings and structures that have been lost – but which played such a memorable part in island life

# Faded beauty of bathing past

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Although we never had the likes of Roman baths in the island – as far as we know! – we have had, and lost, a good number of bathing establishments.

While not necessarily architectural gems, they played an important part in the community, and they are remembered principally as the settings for the memories that were created in and around the island's pools.

Until well into Victorian times, recreational bathing was a principally a solitary or family activity, but in the late 19th century it became much more of a mass social activity – indeed a 'spectator sport'. Victorian entrepreneurs were quick to exploit this, and while the pools and baths received local patronage, their success was really based on the visiting trade.

Away from the better known pools in Douglas, almost all coastal communities had habitual bathing places, and those communities with holiday trade soon developed their own baths – some for public patronage, others by hotels to attract guests – and the pools became hubs for entertainment, not just swimming.

While modern pools have made life safer, the memories taken away nowadays are of learning to swim, the Dolphin Trophy and other sporting achievements – and possibly not so many long-term 'fun' memories as were rooted in and around our pools in years gone by.



Traie Fogog baths in Peel pictured during its heyday. It was built by Douglas businessman Robert Archer at a cost of £1,500 and opened in August 1896

(Bill Quine Collection)

## PEEL POOLS

BY BILL QUINE,  
PEEL HERITAGE TRUST

To give a true picture of the bathing amenities which we have lost around the island is rather hard.

In some cases we are left with a few crumbling walls, a set of steps perhaps, here and there a few rusting bits of metal – what a pity that we had not preserved just one example.

Traie-Fogog (Periwinkle Beach) in Peel was a marvellous example of a Victorian bathing facility.

It was constructed in 1896 to serve the needs of our ex-

panding tourist industry and it was financed by Robert Archer, a retail clothier and drapery businessman, his business named Archer & Evans being in Douglas.

The cost of this venture was £1,500. It was named the Empress Baths in honour of Queen Victoria, this being the time of her Diamond Jubilee.

At the time of its completion it was the largest of its kind in Europe – twice the size of Port Skillion in Douglas.

Port Skillion had also been financed by Mr Archer who was a great advocate of the health benefits to be derived from the exercise of swimming or 'the art of natation' as

it was then known.

An extract from an article published in the Peel City Guardian dated August 1, 1896, helps give us our forebears' appreciation of this new amenity: 'A further attraction and one which must prove of lasting benefit, has been lately added to Peel's natural charms, namely a bathing place at Traie-Fogog.

'Conveniently situated, being just off the Creg Malin headlands, Traie-Fogog has always been a popular bathing resort both with visitors and residents, the only thing lacking being accommodation for bathers' apparel.

'The difficulty has, howev-

er, now been got over. A splendid tank, 120 feet long by 80 wide (or twice the size of the famed Port Skillion) has lately been erected so that bathers can have their refreshing dip at all states of tide, and very good house accommodation has also been provided.

'These inestimable benefits are mainly due to the efforts of Mr Archer, of Douglas, a gentleman who takes a great interest in bathing, and for the comfort and safety of whom he has invented several life-preserving appliances.

'Mr Archer built the bathing creek at Port Skillion, Douglas, and when the place was in proper working order,

he handed it over to the Corporation.

'Since that time Mr Archer has gone further afield to confer his benefits, and it is due to his praiseworthy and commendable energy that we are now enjoying the advantages of a first-class bathing place.

'The advantages of such a place are obvious, and we doubt not that Mr Archer's latest effort will be of incalculable advantage to Peel.

'We hope that the people of Peel, and lodging-house keepers especially, will support Mr Archer and his coadjutors in a very tangible fashion.

'Traie-Fogog bathing place is now open to bathers, but the

formal opening will take place some time this month.'

The actual date of the official opening was August 27, 1896. It remained in operation until well into the 1950s when Peel's second open air pool was constructed at the Creg Malin end of Marine Parade.

This pool, too, has now long since been demolished, although if you look at the rock face above you can still see faintly the word 'POOL' in faded white paint.

The current bathing facility is the Western Swimming Pool located on Derby Road, next to Peel Clothworkers' School.

**SOUTHERN POOLS**  
**BY HUGH DAVIDSON,**  
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**D**uring the first half of the 20th century to the 1970s, Port Erin and Port St Mary were one big holiday camp in summer.

Today they are largely residential and many of those living there work elsewhere.

The built environment has not yet fully transitioned from the glory days of tourism of 60 years ago.

There are two large dilapidated hotels, the former Ocean Castle Hotel site is a scandalous demolition eyesore, and the Traie Meanagh (Middle Bay) Baths are a wreck.

Outdoor bathing used to be a favourite leisure pursuit for visitors and locals. The two main pools in the south were the Traie Meanagh and the ambitious Perwick Bay Hotel Pool of which hardly a trace remains.

The Traie Meanagh Baths opened in June 1899 and hosted swimmers for more than 80 years, closing as baths in 1981.

From the outset, mixed bathing was allowed. This was unusual in 1899 and still a selling point in 1930 when the price for towel, dressing room and attendant was sixpence. There was also a 'first class cafe'.

The baths were geographically linked to Collinson's Cafe above, for tea dances, and to Bradda Glen Cafe for all day and evening activities. In modern terms this was an entertainment complex.

As recently as the 1960s, the baths were packed with spectators and swimmers. Ga-



Band leader Joe Loss with the entrants in a beauty competition at Traie Meanagh

las were held every Wednesday afternoon, with speed swimming events, beauty competitions, high diving, greasy pole, balloon races, egg and spoon, and umbrella swimming. Hotels had weekly competitions for the Squadron Cup.

The sea water in the baths was kept fresh by Tangye's engine which 'supplies 520 tons of sea water per minute and ensures fresh water daily'. The baths were marketed positively, with suggestions

of: warmth, 'lying in a sunny wind-sheltered cove'; health, 'freshest, purest and most bracing salt water bathing'; and size, 'the largest sea-water Baths in the British Isles'.

The baths were sold by the Commissioners in 1981, became a fish farm, and closed completely in 1990.

There are two possible opinions on the site today. One is that it's a piece of tourism archaeology. The Traie Meanagh baths are listed on a website as one of 'Britain's 10 Most Beau-

tiful Abandoned Swimming Pools'. They are certainly a dramatic sight when lashed by winter storms.

Another view, eloquently expressed by Charles Faragher is this: 'In full view of the glen (Bradda) is the eyesore of the derelict and abandoned baths which must have drawn tens of thousands of detrimental comments over the years.'

'Its great ugliness is matched only by its robustness, which makes it capable of defying the elements for

many generations to come.'

The casual visitor to Perwick beach in Port St Mary would today see no trace of either the Perwick Bay Hotel above – replaced by apartments in the 1990s – nor the swimming pool below.

However, close examination would reveal a few small concrete traces of the pool.

The hotel was built by Thomas Clague, a great entrepreneur of the south, and completed in 1915. It was sited in 15 acres and had 24 bed-

rooms, dining room, lounge, smoke room, sun room and parlour.

My brother and I enjoyed two very happy holidays there as boys with our parents.

In 1930, Mr Scrimgeour (1872-1958), a cotton mill owner from Worsley near Salford, bought the hotel. His vision was to create a resort hotel, compensating for the stony Perwick Bay beach.

He was an enterprising man and in 1932 constructed a swimming pool on the beach, accessed by a steep path down from the hotel.

It had baths, dressing rooms, pavilion and refreshment room with waitresses in summer.

The pool was 100ft long and 40ft wide, with sunbathing terraces and aquatic novelties.

In 1935, it was further improved by the addition of shower baths and 21 new bathing huts.

The pool was open to non-residents. Users had to pay 2/6d per week, but the pool closed after tea time and many locals have memories of bathing free, some even skinny dipping at midnight.

Mr Scrimgeour knew this but felt they did no harm. He retired in 1945, aged 73, when the hotel was sold.

Perwick Bay Hotel closed in 1988, but the pool had been out of use for many years before.

Issues were that it was not easy to access, tourist numbers declined, and unheated outdoor pools became uncompetitive. Maintenance costs would also have been significant.

But the many happy memories of those who used the hotel and pool remain.



Egg and spoon race at Traie Meanagh

(Manx Press Pictures)



The baths at Perwick Hotel

(Manx Press Pictures)