

BUILDINGS AT RISK

Heritage: Castletown Police Station still features rings in the wall to which unruly prisoners could be shackled

Police station is full of character – and it deserves to be protected

Today's Buildings At Risk takes a look at Castletown police station, architect and designer Hugh Baillie Scott's last commission in the Isle of Man. The town landmark's future is now uncertain following the announcement that the Isle of Man Constabulary is to relocate to Castletown Civic Centre

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On January 24, 1899, a Commission of Inquiry was set up by the Court of Tynwald to inquire into and report on the condition of Castletown police station.

It which generated the following article in the Isle of Man Examiner of Saturday, February 4, 1899: 'In these days when it is the fashion to agitate for better accommodation in connection with schools, workhouses and gaols, it is perhaps not to be wondered at that the persons interested are dissatisfied with the accommodation afforded by Castletown police station.

'Let us hasten to explain that by persons interested we mean the Manx Police authorities.

'Some people in the absence of this explanation might have inferred that the persons interested in police station accommodation are those who, against their will, find lodgings for the night within the walls of the station.

'Certainly these lieges that are very much interested, and doubtless they have objected frequently and strenuously to the existing accommodation provided in the Metropolitan lock-up.

'But as their objection will also apply with equal force to a new police station, such objections need not be taken into an account here.'

The commission, consisting of the Speaker of the House of Keys, Sir James Gell and Mr JA Mylrea, duly reported back on March 15, 1899, that the police station is 'entirely unfit as a place of detention of persons who have to be temporarily imprisoned.'

The report continued: 'It is built against the outer wall of Castle Rushen close to the main entrance. It consists of a small office and two cells which are practically incurably damp and are ill-lighted and unwholesome places.

'We consider the premises as incapable of extension or improvement.'

The whole basis of the re-



Baillie Scott's police station – distinctive conical roofed tower and shaped gable that he used in his competition design for 'House for an art lover'

(Manx Museum)

port appears to have been the prisoners' discomfort, with no mention of the utter inadequacy of the place for police requirements.

Initially a site on the outer moat was proposed, but this was rejected as it was the intention of the government to remove all excrescences from the moat and surrounding areas following the removal of the buildings erected when the castle served as a prison up to 1891.

The most suitable and convenient site for a police station was a small house and yard in Castle Street opposite the main entrance to the castle.

Tynwald approved the purchase of the site for £300 and a further £500 for the construction of the new building, which, including expenses in connection with the purchase, would make a total of £850.

Mackay Hugh Baillie Scott was commissioned to prepare the plans for the new police station, this would be the last building he designed on the island before he left in 1901.

The new police station would be single-storied, built of local grey limestone and with a slate roof. The entrance would be on Castle Street directly opposite the main entrance to the castle, and the

design would complement the round towers on the castle barbican.

The work was carried out by James Cooper, joiner, builder and undertaker of 31 Arbory Street, Castletown.

Despite its unpromising purpose, Baillie Scott found ample opportunities to include what had by then become his 'trademarks' – doors with elaborate ironwork fittings, leaded windows, exposed beams to ceilings and inglenook fireplaces – and all built to such a high standard that nearly 120 years later it looks as good as ever.

The corner site itself is

about 37ft square, and fits snugly between two existing buildings. It comprises a large general office, two other separate offices, one of which was for weights and measures, a police role at that time, which had its own entrance from the Quayside, and three cells, each 11ft long by 6ft wide.

The cells had a board bed and rings in the wall to which unruly prisoners could be shackled.

The cells had no windows at all, but a ventilator above the doorway which, though heavily barred, would let in some light and fresh air.

There was no heating at all

except for the inglenook fire in the general office and one in the weights and measures office.

At the time that the 'new' police station was opened, the establishment was typically an inspector, sergeant, three constables and a rural constable.

Transport was restricted to bicycles, or on foot. Telephones were not installed in divisional headquarters until 1911, but before that there was the telegraph from 1895. Otherwise, telegrams and letter post.

Castletown had changed considerably in the years im-



BIOGRAPHY: Mackay Hugh Baillie Scott

Born on October 23, 1865, near Ramsgate in Kent, Mackay Hugh Baillie Scott was the eldest child of a wealthy Scottish family, who intended him to manage their extensive farm in Australia. He graduated with a degree in scientific farming and estate management from the Royal Agricultural College in Cirencester, with honours in science and drawing; but instead of farming, he became articled to Major C.E. Davis who was engaged in his "Restoration" of the newly discovered Roman baths in Bath. It was while he was in Bath that he met his wife, Florence, a descendent of the Regency dandy 'Beau' Nash. They married in 1889

and on a whim, they visited the Isle of Man for a holiday. When asked by the young architectural journalist (Sir) John Betjeman why he had stayed so long on the island, Baillie Scott is reputed to have said that was because he was so seasick on the outward journey that he could not contemplate the trip back.

He stayed in the island for 12 years, initially working for Fred Saunderson, a land agent and surveyor before setting up his own practice in 1892. He took evening classes in watercolour and geometry at the Isle of Man School of Art and obtained his Art Teacher's Certificate. There he came into contact with pupil teacher Archibald Knox.

He built the Red House in Victoria Road, Douglas (1893) for himself and his family, and from then onwards he worked from his house.

An early commission was for a cemetery office at Braddan, subsequent Manx commissions included Bishop's Demesne Farm, Kirk Michael (1893); Ivydene, Little Switzerland, Douglas (1893/4); Oakleigh, Glenclutrchery Road,

Douglas (1893/4); Myrtle Bank and Holly Bank, Little Switzerland (1895/6); Leafield and Braeside, King Edward Road, Onchan (1896/7); Falcon Cliff Terrace, Douglas, Onchan village hall (1896); and Castletown police station (1901). All these are still in existence, however a major commission for The Mansion, King Edward Road (later incorporated into the Majestic Hotel) was demolished following de-Registration to make way for apartments.

Baillie Scott left the island in 1901 and moved to Bedford. Baillie Scott said that he wanted to build houses and cottages that could not be distinguished externally from those that had been in the district for centuries, and he liked to use local craftsmen in the buildings he designed to build in the old way.

He was fascinated with the work of blacksmiths, and many of his designs incorporate elaborate door furnishings, hinges, fire dogs and perhaps his most important innovation, the ability by the use of moving screens to open up rooms to make larger entertaining spaces.

Designs for his furniture appeared in catalogues of important London shops – there was even a 'Manxman' piano of his design.

After the Great War not only was the economic and social climate vastly altered but so was his need to maintain a practice whilst struggling to uphold his ideals and standards which were increasingly at odds with modern architecture.

In 1920 Baillie Scott and his family moved to 'Ockhams', a house near Edenbridge in Kent, and he opened offices at 29 John Street, Bedford Row London WC1.

He was responsible for more than 300 houses in countries as far apart as America, Germany, Poland, Austria, Russia, Switzerland and Canada. However, when asked which was his favourite commission he said that it was Waterlow Court in Hampstead Garden Suburb, a block of individual flats of three or four rooms for 50 single working women.

Baillie Scott's wife, Florence, died in 1939, and he moved to Cornwall and then to Brighton where he died in 1945. He is buried in Edenbridge, Kent.



Original Police Station (to the right of the Castle gates) and construction starting on the new Baillie Scott station – bottom left of picture (Manx Museum)

mediately prior to Baillie Scott arriving in the island.

The Governor and Government had transferred from Castletown to Douglas, the castle had ceased to operate as a prison in 1891 when the last prisoners were transferred to the new Victoria Road prison, the last of the British soldiers who were posted to the island had left in 1876 and the first commissioners were elected in 1884.

The old barracks were bought by the Castletown Commissioners, and remained the town hall until well into the 1970s.

Change continues, and the

police station is destined to be on the move again.

Later this year it is hoped that it will be installed in the Castletown Civic Centre, which will give officers much needed room and the opportunity to install all the modern equipment they need.

It will be a far cry from the original police station and 'black hole' attached to the side of the castle.

The fate of the Baillie Scott building has not yet been made known.

It is interesting to read in the report of the Isle of Man Examiner of Saturday, April 10, 1899, commenting on the

acquisition of the land for the new police station in Castletown: "The vandals have defaced, disfigured, demolished, neglected and otherwise obliterated far too many buildings and monuments of historic or antiquarian interest in the Isle of Man and it is pleasant to witness the wakening of a new and more reverent spirit."

We can only hope that in the 21st century, a sustainable use can be found for this unique example of Baillie Scott's work to give it a new life, and that its registration affords more protection than it did to Baillie Scott's similarly-Registered own 'Red House'.



Cell door and double-barred ventilator/window



Castle-inspired door complete with local ironwork, below



Shackle ring for unruly prisoners still in place in each cell to this day

