

BUILDINGS AT RISK

Pier of the realm: how surprise royal visit put Ramsey on map

As mentioned in our first Buildings at Risk article on Ramsey's Queen's Pier, possibly the proudest moment in the Queen's Pier's history occurred 115 years ago this week, when the Royal Yacht carrying the newly-crowned King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra called there. Here Simon Artymiuk looks at the excitement the surprise visit caused in the island, as well as the illustrious careers of the designers of Queen's Pier and Douglas's Iron Pier.

The new film Victoria and Abdul, starring Dame Judi Dench and telling of Queen Victoria's close friendship with an Indian servant, shows Bertie, Prince of Wales (played by Eddie Izzard), showing jealousy and resentment towards this favourite.

However, it is clear from accounts of his surprise visit to the Isle of Man as the newly-crowned King Edward VII in 1902 that he came with an Indian servant of his own - though not without hiccups when islanders were not sure what to make of the exotic stranger.

The unexpected visit came just a few weeks after the coronation.

The ceremony had originally been scheduled for June 26 - and the decorated mugs and tea towels to that effect had been printed - but then the King had developed appendicitis (then often a dangerous condition) and had undergone an emergency operation, with the crowning not taking place until August 9.

The King was then ordered on a voyage of sea air and convalescence by his doctors, which is how, on their way to Scotland, the yacht Victoria and Albert, with its Royal Navy escort of an ironclad cruiser and a destroyer, made an unscheduled call off the Isle



A photograph entitled 'Waiting for the King' showing dignitaries - probably Acting Governor James Gell and Manx historian and Speaker of the House of Keys A W Moore - at the head of Queen's Pier, with a large crowd behind

of Man on the evening of Sunday, August 24.

It was the height of the tourist season and, finding Douglas Bay crammed with small boats, the royal flotilla headed to Ramsey instead.

On the morning of Monday, August 25, the King and Queen, along with three equestrians, the King's private secretary and his physician, Britain's Postmaster-General and the Portuguese ambassador, disembarked at Queen's Pier to be greeted first by Acting-Governor James Gell, Bishop Stratton and island historian A W Moore, then Speaker of the House of Keys, before being cheered by large crowds who had rushed to the pier to see the surprise visitors.

An impromptu tour of the west coast of the island in open carriages was arranged, with the royals first heading towards Bishops Court, where the bishop's family was hastily arranging a reception.

When the party of visitors and their guides reached Ballaugh, two steam trains happened to be passing each other in the station - but both were abandoned by passengers, crew and station staff as they all rushed to the road to see the royal carriages pass.

Also in Ballaugh the royals

had their first sight of a Manx cat, as one was sitting on a wall watching them go by.

Instructions were subsequently sent to Messrs Aldritt Bros of Ramsey to despatch two such animals to Balmoral and two more to Buckingham Palace.

While the entourage was passing through Kirk Michael, a boy attempted to throw a sprig of white heather into the royal carriage, but it fell onto the road.

Despite this, the King ordered the carriage to be stopped and got out to pick up the gift, while turning to the boy and saying: 'This will bring me luck!'

'He wore it in his button-hole for the rest of the visit and also read out the card which came with it, wishing 'long life to the Lord and Lady of Mann'.

The royals went uncheered by a group of quarrymen and fishermen's families who had gathered on Peel Hill, however - they didn't realise the bearded man in tweeds was the King as they had expected him to be wearing a crown!

When they realised their mistake they went running down the road in the hope of catching another glimpse.

The tour continued to Peel Castle, where the custodian, William Cashen, was asked by the royal couple to talk to them in Manx as they had never heard the language.

It was there that an embarrassing incident happened when the King's Indian servant was treated with suspicion and was refused admission to the castle, despite having arrived with picnic baskets sent down from the Royal Yacht.

Despite this, the King thanked Mr Cashen for his entertaining tour of the castle ruins with a guinea. The old man never spent it but instead kept it framed as a reminder of his proud day.

On the way through the Central Valley towards Douglas a visit was made to Greeba Castle, home of Hall Caine, whose novels the Queen admired.

It would appear that the author then joined the party for the rest of their tour, as he ap-

pears in film footage of the visit now held by the British Film Archive. It can be viewed at <http://player.bfi.org.uk/film/watch-the-kings-ride-in-the-isle-of-man-1902-1902/>

The royals also visited Cronkbourne, home of A W Moore's mother, before the King ignored advice and asked to be driven right through the packed streets and promenades of Douglas - where the crush several times blocked the progress of the carriages - to reach the MER's Derby Castle terminus.

The tram company had somehow managed to arrange at short notice for a saloon carriage to be decked out with royal purple cushions and curtains - though the royals had to be literally pushed through the crowds to get on board and the Portuguese ambassador was almost left behind when staff though he was a foreign undesirable trying to get too near the King!

The tram was cheered as it made its way along what was subsequently named King Edward Road en route to Howstrake and Groudle, and afterwards the MER advertised itself as 'Their Majesties' Route to Ramsey... A continuous panorama of mountain, glen, and marine scenery over the Royal Route'.

When he finally left Ramsey via the pier the King laughingly remarked: 'I have never been in such a crowd in all my life', while the Queen told the Bishop: 'I had no idea, my lord, that your island was such a charmingly pretty place', before adding that she hoped to visit the island again in the future.

Acting Governor James Gell subsequently received a letter from Postmaster-General Austen Chamberlain from the Royal Yacht stating that: 'Their Majesties highly appreciated the loyal welcome everywhere offered to them on this, the first occasion of their landing in Man, and greatly admired the beauty of the scenery through which they drove, the richness of the landscape and the healthy appearance of the inhabitants'.

What is more, honours were later sent to some of those who had hosted the surprise visitors.



A photograph of Queen Alexandra, taken later in her life in 1923

The two top engineers behind iron wonders

The engineers of the Isle of Man's two Victorian iron piers were both men with eminent reputations who honed their skills under some of the world's most famous early railway engineers before embarking on projects in far-flung parts of the globe.

The Douglas Iron Pier designer John Dixon was born in 1835 into a Durham Quaker family of coal mine owners.

His uncle was the first chief engineer of the pioneering Stockton and Darlington Railway and was associated with George Stephenson, builder of the famous engine Rocket for the Liverpool and Manchester Railway in 1829.

Educated at a grammar school in Newcastle, John Dixon in 1851 became an articulated pupil of George Stephenson's son Robert, also a famous railway and bridge engineer.

ENGINEER

Dixon went on to be manager and engineer of a North East ironworks before moving to London to open his own engineering and contractors business - which led to him building the pleasure piers at Southport and Douglas as well as landing stages on the Thames Embankment in London, wharves at Huelva in Spain for the Rio Tinto minerals company and a bridge over the Nile in Cairo, Egypt.

He also undertook drainage works in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil and built piers in Mexico and on the River Amazon before, along with Richard Rapier, building the first railway in China, from Shanghai to Woosung, in 1875.

Later he earned credit with the British War Department by discovering a source of fresh water on the Rock of Gibraltar, and with King Luis of Portugal by building a custom house and railway in that country.

Bridges at Waterford in Ireland and the docks at Port Talbot in Wales are also his work, and he rebuilt the famous Hammersmith suspension bridge in London, as well as transporting Cleopatra's Needle from Alexandria in Egypt to the Thames Embankment in London, where it still stands.

On a health visit to South Africa in 1888 he was taken seriously ill, and though he returned to Britain, he never fully recovered and died in 1891 aged just 56.



Sir John Coode

The Ramsey Queen's Pier designer Sir John Coode, was born in 1816 in Bodmin to an old Cornish family which could trace its descent back to the 15th century.

He initially seemed set to follow his father's profession as a solicitor but then a relative introduced him to James Meadows Rendel, a past president of the Institute of Civil Engineers, and he was articulated as a pupil at Rendel's Plymouth practice.

Coode then spent seven years helping construction of the great Isambard Kingdom Brunel's Great Western Railway and Bristol and Exeter Railway, together forming a route stretching from London Paddington to Devon which is still important today.

In 1844, Coode set up his own practice and surveyed the route of a railway through Northern Spain from Santander to Madrid.

In 1847 he became engineer for the project to build a Harbour of Refuge at Portland in Dorset, the first foundation stone of which was laid by Queen Victoria's consort Prince Albert in 1849.

The work took until 1872 to complete, with Coode involved throughout, and after its opening by the Prince of Wales (the future King Edward VII), Coode was knighted.

Meanwhile, in 1858 a roy-

al commission saw Coode inspecting harbours right across Britain and Ireland with a view to improving them as Harbours of Refuge, and he also became engineer in chief for a harbour at Table Bay in Cape Town, in South Africa.

PRINCE ALFRED

Prince Alfred opened the first stage of it in 1870 and Coode designed an outer harbour there too in 1883.

In 1864 Coode was consulted on a number of works in the Isle of Man.

This included the building of the ill-fated Port Erin breakwater (later destroyed by a storm), and, more successfully, the building of the Victoria and Battery Piers at Douglas, improvements to the harbours at Peel and Port

St Mary - and the building of the large iron Queen's Pier at Ramsey.

In 1867 Coode began improvements to the harbour at St Helier, Jersey - which were also marred by a storm - while the major project of building the first lighthouse made entirely of concrete on the La Corbiere rock in 1873-74 has stood the test of time.

More improvements to harbours in southern Africa followed, and in 1873 he designed a major breakwater at Colombo in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) which resulted in a major improvement in trade and revenue at the port.

HARBOURS

In 1878 he made the first of two visits to Australia, first improving harbours near Melbourne in Victoria before going on to design new harbours in New Zealand's South Island.

On his second visit Down Under in 1885 he also inspected harbours at Trincomalee and Singapore for the British Admiralty and Bombay for the Government of India. These resulted in him being created a Knight Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George.

Despite now being in his 70s, the 1880s also saw him supervising sewer improvement works in London, becoming involved in the Suez Canal Project and consulting on other projects in the Caribbean, Sierra Leone, Cyprus and Newfoundland. From 1889-91 he was president of the Institution of Civil Engineers.

Sadly, while on a visit to Italy in 1891, he had to undergo a major operation and, though he seemed to be recovering well after returning to England, he suffered a relapse and died at Brighton in 1892, aged 76.



A Victorian engraving of John Dixon's bridge across the Nile in Gizeh, Egypt



A Vanity Fair cartoon of the author Hall Caine, who was known by his literary friends by the Manx nickname 'Hommy Beg', as he was quite a small man though of striking appearance due to his red hair and beard and large, piercing eyes

The reign of King Edward VII lasted only until 1910, but the MER carriage in which he travelled is still running and the naming of King Edward Road is an enduring reminder of that eventful day.

● Broadway Cinema is holding snack and screen mid-week movie specials of Victoria and Abdul. They take place today (Tuesday) to Thursday from 1pm with the screening at 2.30pm.



A Vanity Fair cartoon of King Edward VII dated 1902