

BUILDINGS AT RISK

Landmark mill's rich history dates back at least 500 years

Following on from our previous article on the many diverse mills – lost and saved – powered by the Silverburn, this week Susan Temple of Castletown Heritage Trust looks in more depth at one which has had a long and generally lucky life.

If you walk down the Silverburn River from Ballasalla to its exit into Castletown Harbour you will find the Golden Meadow Mill a few hundred yards from the sea.

Industrial Archaeology of the Isle of Man by Bawden, Garrard, Qualtrough and Scatchard describe it as being 'one of the most important and probably the first used sources of water power in Man'.

The mill complex, which is visible from almost all sides, rises out of the surrounding meadows like a beacon.

There has been a mill on the site since at least 1511, when it appears on the Manorial Roll as 'two grain mills near the castle'.

The tenant at that time was one William Hubart. It was one of the 'Lord's Mills' and one of the earliest town mills in the island.

Under the English Lordship, each parish had a mill, or perhaps mills.

Each farmer was assigned a mill where he had to take his grain to be ground into flour.

The miller took payment in kind for his services and paid the Lord for the right to use the water as a power source.

The parishes appear to have been set up in the second half of the 12th Century.

There were also grain mills upstream of the Golden Meadow Mill attached to Rushen Abbey.

In pre-Reformation days, the Cistercian Monks were known for their expertise in land and water management and for their knowledge of agriculture of which grain would have been an important part.

In Wood's Atlas of 1867 the Golden Meadow Mill still appears as 'Mill rent near Castletown' as part of the Abbey Demesne, however, the Proprietor is shown as Thomas Moore.

Its name seems to have derived from the flower-rich water meadows surrounding the mill.

These protected Castletown from flooding, and in turn provided rich pasture, used as common grazing land for the people of the town.

The cows would be stabled at the back of their houses, taken to the water meadows



Golden Meadow Mill, in Castletown. Pictured inset, right, William Thomas Faragher, miller from 1921 to 1951

each day, then brought home each evening for milking.

The milk would then be sold to the people of Castletown.

Current Mill Buildings

The principal period of mill building on the Silverburn was in the 18th and early 19th century, and the current Golden Meadow Mill was built in about 1815 on the site of earlier mills dating back to the start of the 1500s or even the 1400s.

It was constructed by Deemster Thomas Moore of Great Meadow and was promoted in the Manx Advertiser of 29th February 1816 as 'Those most eligibly and newly erected corn and threshing mills at Castletown to be let

for a term of years as may be agreed upon, and may be entered upon at May or November next.

'Conveniently situated for carrying on the wholesale business and commanding the custom of a very extensive neighbourhood.....Apply at the proprietor, Mr Thomas Moore, Great Meadow.'

In addition to the existing mill buildings, there was a forge, pig sty and also another identical building directly opposite the mill.

Sadly, when the present owners bought the property in 1982, the latter building was dangerously derelict and had to be pulled down.

It is thought that it was used as a snuff mill at one time,

and was certainly used as part of the rope works shown on the 1869 Ordnance Survey Map.

According to the authors of the 1972 book 'Industrial Archaeology of the Isle of Man', the owners of the Castletown Mills were usually progressive and added other water-powered manufactures to corn milling.

There is a wonderful advertisement in the newspaper for 1920 announcing the arrival of 'A splendid pair of Diamond Brand Burr Composition mill stones, bought for a very high figure for Mr John Cowley (Miller) by Mr Thomas Moore, Billown – Mill stones for the future – they crush the poorest grain as if it had no husk'.

Towards the end of its working life the mill largely produced animal feed.

The complex of mill buildings is very impressive.

The main mill is four stories high, it is made of local limestone then rendered.

On one side of the mill was a threshing mill and on the other is a drying kiln in a small extension attached to the main building.

The 'new mill' is one of the largest on the island, and even now is probably the tallest building in the area with the exception of the castle.

Unusually, there are two water wheels, one smaller than the other which stand side by side between the threshing mill and the main

mill building.

Each wheel uses a different system – the larger wheel adjacent to the corn mill is an undershot, the smaller wheel adjacent to the threshing mill is an overshot.

The power for the mill-wheels came from the water stored in the mill pond which stood on an embankment directly behind the mill.

It was fed by water from the Silverburn River via a dam, sluice and mill stream some 500 yards upstream.

The millstream then continues on its way to the sea across the meadow.

Today, it goes under the railway line and the road, and then down behind Athol Terrace before disappearing in-



Twin water wheels – larger for the corn mill, small for threshing mill



Restored machinery in Golden Meadow Mill

to the harbour, but until the building of the railway line in 1873 and the bypass at the turn of the century, there would have been nothing between the mill and the harbour except Qualtrough's Yard.

The mill pond was drained in the late 1990s because the silting up of the mill pond tended to flood the adjacent fields.

The drying kiln, which has recently been restored, consists of a two-floored extension containing a ground floor furnace with a drying floor made of square perforated terracotta tiles above.

There is a louvered construction attached to the ridge of the roof to allow the warm moist air to disperse.

The drying kiln was not without its own dangers.

There were a number of fires recorded in the 19th century.

And one in 1929 when the Douglas fire brigade took 45 minutes to reach the blaze by

which time the fire had been largely brought under control by the efforts of Mr J.D. Qualtrough MHK and his men from Qualtrough's Yard.

The mills on the Silverdale often changed 'trades' as the financial climate dictated.

The Golden Mill seems to have been an exception, as whilst they diversified, corn milling remained the key enterprise, and there are a number of advertisements for experienced millers to take over the tenancy of Golden Mill during the 19th century.

They did not all fare well, especially since local farmers were no longer compelled to use specific mills.

The family of John Arnold, who was the Miller in the 1881 Census and who died in 1882, lost the tenancy of the Mill because a member of the family 'carelessly neglected to deliver the rent money on time'.

In 1921, the bankruptcy sale on behalf of John Cowley (the then Miller) included not only the expected cart, float, harness, 60 bolls of barley, 3 cows, pigs, two horses and 'live and dead stock' but also the sale of a nine-acre field in Ballasalla next to the Railway Station advertised as 'The Golden Sunrise Building Estate'.

After leaving Golden Mill, Mr Cowley took on the tenancy of Kewaigue Mill, where he died in 1931.

His obituary described him as 'an ardent enthusiast in favour of generating an all-island electricity supply from water power'.

The mill remained in the possession of the Moore Family until 1982 when it was sold.

Mrs D. Corlett in her 1981 booklet about Golden Mill, says: 'Until April of this year, the mill has been in constant use.'

'In the 1950s because of the deterioration of the wheel, automatic machinery was installed. The present tenants, Mr Cubbon and his family, were asked to vacate the mill in May of this year, it will not be used again as a mill as all the machinery has been sold.'



Golden Meadow Mill (circled) on the 1869 Ordnance Survey, and inset what is believed to be the mill on a 1646 plan



The view of the Castle and Golden Meadow Mill approaching from the North (which would be lost if the land marked in red recently approved in the Castletown Housing Land Review is built on)

Sustainable uses for our built heritage

Golden Meadow illustrates the importance of finding sustainable uses for our built heritage.

The mill complex has now been sympathetically restored and the owners' sustainable re-purposing has extended its life – the threshing mill has been turned into an attractive house and the Miller's Cottage has been renovated.

The Mill has been re-roofed and the drying kiln reconstructed. With the help of Mr John Humphries, a retired mechanical engineer, the mill has been restored to working order, except that it is now driven by a diesel engine instead of water.

The mill also houses, for their winter quarters, some of the family's prize-winning

white Cochon and black Polish fowl.

It is not possible to say how much of the existing buildings pre-date 1815, but it seems clear that milling has been carried out on the site for more than 500 years.

In an age when buildings have a finite life, it is comforting to know that there are still people who want to ensure that their buildings will go on for centuries more.

The (Golden) Meadow Castletown Mill has played a role in the community for over half a millennium, and over recent centuries has made its stamp on the landscape as one of the major landmarks in Castletown and in the parish of Malew.

Key to this is the view which residents and visitors have, particularly from the

railway and the road. These views have remained unobstructed whilst the fields were used for agriculture (when not flooded).

The remaining Mill buildings themselves have been saved and are not at risk due to the owners' efforts and the mill's entry in the Protected Buildings Register.

However, the mill's centuries-old position as a Castletown landmark is now under threat.

The mill's current owners do not own or control their surroundings; and the recent decision by the Castletown Housing Land Review to progress land around the mill for housing (see illustration) could see the loss of the Registered Building's setting and effective loss of the centuries-old landmark.