

BUILDINGS AT RISK

The landmarks that shape the island's distinctive landscape

Frank Cowin, a Blue Badge Guide, shares his views on the buildings and structures of interest and importance in our landscape and their vary degrees of protection – or lack of protection.

When guides are training, the importance of TVPs and TPIs are stressed.

TVPs are Top Visual Points – those things that can be seen from that position and which could catch the attention and interest of those in the group; whereas TPIs are the Top Points of Interest in the area – things not necessarily in sight but which have a story to tell.

King Orry's Grave is obviously a TVP if you are travelling by coach and have turned off the main Ramsey Road at Minorca to go over the Ballaragh Road.

It is clearly visible from the coach and, with luck, the coach may be able to loiter alongside it whilst being ready to move on if other traffic appears. On other occasions with more specialist groups it would warrant a visit actually to the site.

Continuing on the way to Ramsey via Maughold a small group of pine trees seen across the Ballaglass valley mark the site of Cashtal yn Ard, which then becomes a TPI especially as King Orry's Grave has already been seen and explained.

Both King Orry's Grave and Cashtal yn Ard – as Neolithic burial long barrows – are fully protected as ancient monuments, as is Lag ny Keilley on the steep seaward slope of Cronk ny Iree Lhaa.

This ancient keill and its surrounding burial site is only to be visited by the most intrepid and interested of visitors. The site, the view, and the experience of the journey make it well worthwhile.

Whilst not all can actually visit Lag ny Keilley, it is an important TPI as the site can be pointed out during a visit to the Niarbyl, or on the way from there towards the Round Table.

It gives opportunity to talk about the Celtic Church and/or tell some of the stories attached to the site such as that of 'being the chosen burial place of some of the Irish Kings', or that recorded by Sophia Morrison as 'The Child without a Name' in her Manx Fairy Tales.

Also on the way to and from Niarbyl there is an excellent view of the earth-covered



Valerie Singleton filming for Blue Peter at the Snaefell Mine (1974)

concrete bunkers from the wartime Chain Home station there.

Three of these World War Two Chain Home radar stations gave cover from the Isle of Man for the Irish Sea area and approaches to its ports such as Liverpool.

Positioned at Niarbyl, Bride and Scarlett they were later joined by a CHL (Chain Home Low) station on the Meayll Hill above Cregneash. Very little of the wartime structures, apart from a few at RAF Jurby, have any formal protection towards their long-term survival.

Returning to Laxey and taking the Snaefell Mountain

Railway to the Summit, of all the TVPs and TPIs visible, Laxey Wheel is the only one with any formal protection. I am pleased to say that a view point for the Wheel is kept clear of vegetation and the trams stop there long enough for passengers to enjoy the view.

Travelling up the valley opens up views across to where some of the lades (water courses) serving the Wheel and other equipment at the mines are visible along with some of the extraordinarily wide and high stone walls enclosing the upper fields of Ballacowle.

A little further up the valley

we look across to what, after a shower of rain, is to my mind one of the most spectacular waterfalls to be seen on the Island.

Alongside the track leading to the waterfall and on to Snaefell Mines can be seen a stone structure which is in fact a small lime kiln. Similar kilns can be seen at a number of places on the island, including immediately alongside the road above Ballafayle Farm, Maughold and alongside the 'Gooseneck' road at The Hibernian.

Larger commercial kilns can be found in public places but especially at Scarlett, Derbyhaven, and The Point at Port St Mary. Fuel and limestone was put in the kiln and fired, resulting in quicklime for building purposes and for use on the land.

On the up-valley side of the Waterfall are the remains of Laggan Agneash.

The late Misses Wood of Laxey told tales of moving up there in summer months, tales which included visits to family at Ballaugh with their Father in the days before the MER line to Ramsey – travelling on the Fairy Queen and

walking back home because there was no boat that day.

The older of the sisters also recalled watching the procession of horse-drawn carts carrying two-by-two the coffins of the victims of the Snaefell Mine Disaster of 1897.

This tragic tale was re-told by Valerie Singleton in 1974, when the Blue Peter children's television programme featured as their dramatic story the Snaefell mine disaster with the loss of 20 lives due to an underground fire over a weekend and the men being overcome by carbon monoxide fumes as they climbed down the shaft on the Monday



King Orry's Grave, Laxey (1993)



Snaefell mine powder house (1997)



Pillbox at former RAF Jurby (2002)



Snaefell sheepfold walls (1991)

morning.
At the head of the Laxey Valley the Snaefell Mine itself comes into view with remains from both the 19th and 20th centuries.

Reworking of the waste heaps – ‘the deads’ – in the 1950s using a cyanide extraction process resulted in the river and part of Laxey Bay being contaminated.

The river took a long time to recover and perhaps we may only consider that complete when the salmon return to the river called by their name.

One building in the group which is of particular inter-

est is the Powder House – the explosives store – with its double-walled construction and lightweight roof (now gone) which meant that if there was an accident inside, all the force of the explosion would be safely upwards and not horizontal.

Remains, or better, of some others survive across the island, not all of them in mining areas.

Beyond the Bungalow, the main view changes from being on the right to being on the left and in the bottom of the valley can be seen the remains of a wheel case from a mining trial.

What cannot be seen is one



Laggan Agneash, former summer home of the Misses Wood (1992)



Limekiln at Laggan Agneash (1995)



Chain Home radar station at Dalby (app 1944) photo John Hall

of a small number of simple stone-arched bridges still to be found in some of the upland areas. It is a bridge of this type which causes much excitement and comment every time it appears when the water level at the Injebreck reservoir drops as it has done at present.

Nearby on the lower slopes of Snaefell and therefore not visible from the tram – but clearly seen from the Brandywell Road, or from the edge of the Tholt-y-Will road immediately above it – is a large stone built circular

structure with four straight walls radiating out from it, making it look like a compass rose.

It is a sheep fold used for rounding up the sheep that had been grazing on the common lands where in past times all the abutting farmers had a right to have their sheep.

Consequently, every so often they had to rounded up and separated, especially soon after lambing so that the newborns could be marked with their owner's mark. Whilst we are used to seeing sheep marked with dye, and more recently ear tags, in these days the ears were ‘clipped’. A vari-



Bridge on the Millenium Way between Snaefell and Beinn y Phott (1991)



Grand field walls in the Laxey valley (1997)



Laxey Wheel from MER (1993)

ety of different cuts being used to mark the differing owners sheep.

The King's Forester who oversaw the Mountain Grazing had a book with sheep-ear shaped leaves and these had similar cuts to each with the farmer's name and address on the back.

This sheepfold too had its turn in the television limelight when it featured to great effect in the final episode of the BBC's rather sinister detective series ‘The Shadow Line’, much of which was filmed here on the island.

As other groups of now derelict buildings come into view

even more stories can surface, and visits to various places around the island would bring to light other links to the past. Horse walks, bee boles, hen houses, smithies, gateposts, windmills, lazy beds, tholtans, monuments and memorials, thie vegs are just a few that could be explored.

It would be a great pity if these things, and so many more, were allowed to disappear because there was no record of their importance or means to ensure they were not swept away without at least a consultation and that no penalty exists if they are vandalised.