

BUILDINGS AT RISK

Island's landscape reveals much of our social history

Frank Cowin, *Blue Badge Guide*, continues to share his views of things of interest and importance in the landscape - many at risk because they are not recognised, let alone protected.

In the last article I finished off just as the buildings at Corody and Creggan came into view on a trip on the Snaefell Mountain Railway from Laxey to the Summit.

The keeill at Corody dedicated to St Ciaran is an ancient monument protected by law but neither set of farm buildings are.

Between the keeill and the dwelling is a well, this one is a 'walk down' well with covered steps disappearing down into the water at the bottom and is such a rarity in the island.

The water level however can vary from dry to spilling out over the top step!

Other types of well are dug into a bank or can be covered at the top with a circular structure, sometimes with a 'sliced off' slab roof.

There are many varieties of well but these days they are no longer essential and are sometimes seen as a safety hazard so they are disappearing at an increasing rate.

At Corody the main front wall of the house fell out many years ago and when I first visited the site the wall lay complete with windows and door clearly visible.

Erosion by people and animals means that this is no longer the case.

The house had been a two-story building and was home to the only man to die in the Snaefell Mine disaster who did not live on the Laxey side of 'The Mountain'.

CHIOLLAGHS

The house at Corody had a small smoke window at the side of the chiollagh, the kitchen fireplace, which in this case appears to have stretched right across the width of the house.

The chimney was a wattle and daub canopy taking the smoke up to a stone stack at roof level.

This is indicated by the bell shaped recess in the internal face of the wall which can be seen to good effect at a property in Glen Dhoo, Ballaugh.

This type of chiollagh and chimney is at odds with the general view that they are all like that in Harry Kelly's Cottage at Cregneash, which is more or less an indoor inglenook, with masonry side walls, a slate front lintel, and



Glen Dhoo chiollagh (1998)

a stepped chimney above.

Whilst the type seen at Harry Kelly's is the most numerous, it could be that because of its form it has been the most likely to survive.

In fact at least a couple of the buildings at Cregneash show the signs of having had a canopy type of flue.

Another variety of fireplace found chiefly on the slopes of South Barrule, and of which there are only a few surviving, uses pillars and lintels of granite at the sides instead of the masonry walls of Harry Kelly's.

The main long front lintel is however usually of slate.

A similar form of construc-

tion is said to be found in the Channel Islands.

FARM STRUCTURES

Immediately behind the house are two parallel standing stones of equal height, each with a notch in the top to receive the axle of the grindstone used to sharpen the tools.

The remains of a small barn is abutted by a circular horse walk where in this case a single horse, or possibly cow, would walk in a circle to drive through beams and gears a threshing machine in the barn. One side of the raised horse walk extends to cover a poultry house - in this case

large enough to accommodate ducks or geese.

The island has very few covered horse walks, which are common elsewhere.

A very good example of an un-covered two-animal horse walk complete with its threshing machine in place can be seen amongst the outbuildings at the Grove Rural Life Museum in Ramsey.

Poultry houses of all shapes and sizes can be found associated with older properties across the island with differing styles being favoured in various places at different times. Laying boxes for hens can get confused with 'Bee Boles'.



Lazy beds, Glen Rushen (1993)



Bee boles (with straw Bee Skep), Kentraugh (2003)



Grindstone supports at Corody (1992)

'Bee Boles' are rectangular recesses in a wall or earth bank intended for the 'bee skeps', the plaited straw hives used in the past.

Ideally they would be sited so as to be sheltered from heavy frosts and from the height of the sun - either of which could kill off the bees.

Laying boxes for hens would be roughly twice as wide as the 'bee boles' with half of the opening closed off with a slab of slate or similar material.

The nest material would then be behind the slab. Both would normally be set some two to three feet above ground level.

In some bigger farms there could be a two storey pig sty with the ash pit serving the Thie Veg - the earth closet.

The Thie Vegg could come in differing sizes having a single, two or even three holes varied to suit the family! The Vegg and other small buildings might have a slab covered roof if suitable stones were available in that particular area.

The materials buildings were built of is a whole different story. Associated with many upland homes are 'Lazy beds'.



Chiollagh in Harry Kelly's cottage, Cregneash (1991)



Corody horsewalk platform/mechanism (1993)



Walk-in well at Corody (1993)



Walk-in well at Corody (1993)



Pair of gateposts with holes and slots for wooden bars (1994)

These are narrow areas for growing vegetables, herbs etc. for the table and the contents of the ashpit would be added to the beds each time the pit was emptied.

Original gateposts are high risk of loss in country areas due to the need to widen access to fields for modern machinery.

Many 'estates' had individual styles for all their openings off the highway and even these are at risk, but most at risk are the older types one of which used individual bars, or with the bars fastened together to form a hurdle.

One post would be made of a slate slab with rectangular

holes formed in it whilst the other had corresponding 'key fret' recesses cut into the face. The bars would then be slotted into the hole and the other end run along the horizontal cut to drop into the downward cut of the fret pattern.

These appear to survive largely in the north of the island, while in the south a gate hinge where one upper stone of the gate post was holed vertically and left projecting.

At the bottom a socket stone was set into the ground and the gate had projecting pins at the top and bottom to

fit into them. Evidence for a door hinge of this type was found at the Keeill at Lag ny Keeilley. Both types were replaced using iron gudgeons either set into a stone pillar or the face of a slate slab. More recently precast concrete posts have been used.

A UNIQUE SHED

A small building that has not been lovingly maintained stands in the corner of a field on the Tholt y Will Road on the up-valley side of the former mill at the top end of Old Sulby Village.

Built of timber and corrugated iron it has gaping holes in its roof and one cor-

ner looks ready to collapse. A small apparently insignificant building but nevertheless one with stories to tell.

It is the last drying shed where cloth woven in the mill would be hung to dry after 'fulling'.

The remains of fulling machinery can still be found in 'The Mill' at Tynwald Mills.

Drying was more usually carried out in the open with the cloth hung on 'Tenter Frames'.

The shed at Sulby was built with louvered sides to allow the wind to blow through.

Perhaps the highlight of the stories is where the wood used for covering the end

furthest from the road came from.

It is the reused blades from a dismantled water wheel!

STILL DISAPPEARING

It is ironic that in the time since the last article in the series was written that work has started on demolishing one of the last surviving set of Second World War structures in Douglas.

These structures are the cluster of air raid shelters for the trainees of HMS St George. St George was the Royal Navy's Boy Entrant School, the former Cunningham's Camp now Shoprite site, to which boys from the various Naval

training schools across Britain had been evacuated.

It is thought that the shelters were also used for training with regard to working in and escaping from smoke logged areas of ships.

It is known that they were used by local First Aid and Rescue organisations for training in the removal of casualties. It is probable that no proper record of them exists, even if there are overwhelming reasons to remove them.

It emphasises yet again the importance of recognising and having a list of all structures of importance, and recording those that do have to be destroyed.