

BUILDINGS AT RISK

Monuments and milestones make their mark on Mann

Frank Cowin, *Blue Badge Guide*, looks at more of the objects in the countryside which interest him and other locals and visitors alike. Very few are recognised, and none of these has any form of protection.

The island has many memorials of which few people are aware, one such is on the roadside at Ballaragh, Lonan.

It memorialises the loss of the steam trawler 'Merisia' with all her crew on the rocks below Bulgham in January 1940.

Rescue from the land in the darkness was, according to the authorities, impossible, and none of the lifeboats were able to get there.

The people from Ballaragh, who had raised the alarm, were so upset at being prevented from making any attempt to assist that they later created this informal roadside memorial.

Another probably better known, but perhaps more difficult to find, is that to the loss of the schooner 'Provider' on Langness in 1853 while on passage from Liverpool to Glasgow with a cargo of salt.

While the stone claims 'all lost', one man did in fact survive, although all the other five crew members were lost.

It is possible that it was James Boom, the one survivor, who carved the letters but it has been lovingly maintained by others since.

Another monument, but in this case without words and almost as far from the sea as it is possible get in the Isle of Man, takes the form of a 'matchstick man' depicted using white quartz stones set in the Mountain Wall high up on the Eastern hillside of the East Baldwin Valley.

It is close to the route of the original mountain 'road' to the north of the island from Douglas.

This old highway went along Ballanard Road and travelled straight on until reaching Abbeylands Methodist Chapel and then branched left.

The track climbs steadily passing round the west side of Slieau Ree across the open mountainside, which is open to public rambling.

This old highway can be seen as a 'hollow way' just below the present Mountain Road from a little beyond Keppel Gate to Windy Corner.

It should be remembered that while much of the hillsides



Deemster's memorial, Baldwin (2005)

(photo: manxscenes.com)

are open to public rambling, they are used for hill pastures and due care should be taken not to disturb animals or indeed any wildlife.

The Mountain Wall and the land below it like the land adjoining or surrounding many of the other features described in these articles are private property.

While the old highway is only really for the hardened walkers, this monument is most easily seen from the gate opposite the former East Baldwin Chapel and looking directly across the valley to the top wall.

A good pair of binoculars would improve the view!

The figure is said to represent where the body of a deemster travelling from the north to attend an urgent court meeting

perished in a snow blizzard.

Set in the wall a little to the left of the representation of the deemster is a large white boulder said to be where the body of his horse was found.

Not a monument in the same way as the memorials already described, but a marker of ownership is a white pig, technically a boar with tusks and a curly tail, with a date underneath.

This plaque decorates a farm building at Staward, Sulby.

It also graces the porch of Seafield, now Arragon, Santon.

It is a 'rebus', a visual pun on a name or title; in this case the Bacon family who were big property owners on the island.

However it does also appear as a memorial on the family monument on the south wall

in Onchan Parish Church.

Returning to roadside features, much admired and commented on are our mile markers.

The cast iron 'triangular' ones on most roads and the flat semi-circular type on the Mountain Road are of particular interest to some industrial archaeologists, but all are interested in the older mile stones of which only a few survive.

The more modern, the cast iron ones, it is hoped have a good chance of surviving but the older stone markers seem to continue to disappear.

Another item of industrial archaeological interest is a grave at Old Kirk Braddan.

It stands close to the northern boundary of the burial ground near the west end of the church.

It is a cast iron 'chest tomb'

where the above ground structure is a rectangular box.

At one time it obviously had plaques on the sides, made of stone/marble or possibly timber – these have disappeared but the fixings to hold them in place have survived.

As a result, there is no way of knowing whose grave it is.

While cast iron graves are reasonably common in certain areas of England, this is the only one I am aware of in the Isle of Man.

One of the most unexpected and interesting pieces of industrial archaeology is a cowshed at Balladoole Farm at Fishers Hill, south of Castle-town.

The roof of the open-fronted cowshed is supported on a row

of highly ornamented cast iron columns.

These had originally formed part of an elaborate and stately verandah at Balladoole House.

Balladoole had been in the ownership of the Stevenson family for generations until 1828 when there was no male heir but two daughters.

The eldest daughter had married Captain Thomas Woods and she inherited Balladoole. Her sister had married Captain John Quilliam RN and inherited other family properties.

Some generations on, the verandah had been added to what was originally a Queen Anne style house built in 1714.

A later family row led to the heir emigrating to Canada, only returning when his father died.

He changed the family name from Woods back to Stevenson,



Silverdale (1999)



The pillars on their original verandah on the house

(photo: Manx Museum)(Library)



Mile-marker (1997) and Right: Milestone 'XXIII miles' (to Castletown) (2018)



Provider memorial, Langness (1993)



Balladoole cowshed pillar (1999)



Merisia memorial, Ballaragh (1993)

roundabout too greatly.

However, when questions were asked about it the answer seemed to be "it's only a children's plaything and not of any real importance".

The Association for Industrial Archaeology (AIA) came to the island to hold their inaugural meeting at Port Erin in September 1973.

Professor Michael Rix, who is credited with coining the name 'industrial archaeology', gave the keynote address, in which he stated that the Silverdale roundabout was his favourite piece of industrial archaeology, not only on the Isle of Man, and it was one of the reasons for bringing his student groups over from England on field visits.

As a result, on the Sunday afternoon after the official close of the proceedings at lunchtime, locals attending were pressed into service to take the members to whatever sites they wished to visit.

Silverdale was on everyone's list, as it was when the AIA made a return visit in 2006.

When I arrived there with my party – a little later than

most having first visited the Nautical Museum – we were greeted with the sight of two circles of people around the roundabout.

The inner circle was made up of all those eminent lecturers, writers and broadcasters who were hopping on and off and starting and stopping it.

The outer circle was made up of a rather despondent line of children who thought it should be theirs! Need I say more.

In these three most recent articles in the Buildings at Risk series, most of the items discussed would not qualify as a building and so unless it is an ancient monument there is no process under Manx law which can provide protection to it.

Mostly they would seem at first thought to be insignificant, past their time, and of no value.

The hope is that readers will have thought again about them and realised that these items and structures, and the stories they tell, are of value to us as they capture our past in a way that enhances our wellbeing and is part of those things that make us appreciate living here.

'Protection is needed for features in the landscape and for the landscape itself'



Staward rebus for the Bacon family (1993)

and also removed the verandah. The cowshed can perhaps be claimed as a memorial to family troubles!

A further industrial archaeology story shows just how easy it is for things of importance to be altered, or destroyed, because of people not being aware of that importance or of the stories they hold.

Those stories are not only of interest and importance to us as residents but also to our visitors especially those from overseas. A few years ago someone had

a minor accident at Silverdale on the roundabout.

As a result it was decided that it would have to be altered for health and safety reasons.

No planning or other permissions were required and no notices of any intent released.

The structure was in the ownership of a government department and the work was well under way before any member of the public became aware of what was happening.

Fortunately, the results of the work did not alter the

It is also hoped that there is a realisation that they have a monetary value as well, in that they contribute to the attractions which bring people to the island and make them want to return.

To continue to do this, they need protection, perhaps simi-

lar to conservation areas which give a degree of protection to both buildings and their settings.

Such protected zones in the countryside could help protect such items as discussed in these articles, but also the landscape in which they are set.