

## BUILDINGS AT RISK

# Harcroft and Springfield – not even shadows left now

In this week's *Buildings at Risk*, Susan Temple continues her look at the group of fine grand houses which once stood on an historic estate on the outskirts of Douglas.

**T**he start of the 19th century saw significant improvements in both agriculture and housebuilding on the Isle of Man.

John Christian Curwen of Ewanrigg and Milntown was not only variously both an MP and an MHK, but also a passionate campaigner to improve agricultural productivity across the British Isles, for which work he was awarded a Gold Medal by the Royal Society for the Advancement of the Arts, Commerce and Manufactures.

At the same time, Manx architecture was also increasingly influenced by imported styles and architects, notable in the sophisticated 'town mansions' that were erected on the outskirts of Douglas as it expanded exponentially.

In the first half of the 19th century, a number of imposing Regency Villas were built in the parish of Braddan about two miles from Douglas. Two of the houses, Springfield and Ballaughton, were additional/replacement mansions, but Harcroft was the first grand/mansion house on the land.

These houses were built (for the most part) for people of a certain style from outside the island who flocked there at that time.

In 1805, Captain Thomas Harrison bought the remainder of the Curleod Ballaughton Estate for £5,000 (see *Buildings at Risk* on Ballaughton in the Isle of Man Examiner of June 12, 2018).

The estate was divided, and two large houses –



Harcroft, pictured on an MEA greetings card

Harcroft and Springfield – were built on part of the land within the next 25 years.

It was at this point that the farmland was divorced from the houses, leaving about

three and one half acres at Springfield, and five and one half acres at Harcroft.

In 1811 there is an advertisement for the farm at Springfield by Mr Mark Cosnahan, the existing tenant, for 156 acres to be let for the remainder of a lease of 19 years, which would date from the time that Mr Harrison purchased the land (it is uncertain how this fitted with later Springfield House, and if these lands were part of the adjoining Anagh Coar).

In 1703 Bishop Wilson was instrumental in bringing to an end the long running dispute over the 'land question'.

Three representatives of the House of Keys met representatives of the then Earl of Derby, and an agreement was

reached whereby the land rents were doubled and then fixed in perpetuity.

This lasted until 1916 when the Manx landholders bought the then Crown Rights. It gave farmers an incentive to improve the land and build better farmhouses and farmyard; reinforced by the ideas of John Christian Curwen et al.

In the 1811 advertisement for the farm at Springfield you can see that a tremendous effort had been put into modernising the buildings and improving the land by importing dung and also lime.

Springfield Farm also had a 'Capital threshing machine worked by water'.

Sadly none of these glo-

ries were passed on to the owners of the 'new' Springfield when it was built in the early half of the 19th century.

### **SPRINGFIELD**

Springfield was the smallest of the three villas. Even so it had a lodge, six bedrooms, nurseries, stables, and outbuildings, the whole surrounded by lawns, and flower beds.

There was a vegetable garden, and woodland.

The approach was down a wooded drive. The whole was stuccoed and painted with a large bay at the gable end of the house.

In this respect it resembled the other two houses, Harcroft and Ballaughton, and also other villas built nearer to Douglas on Belmont Hill.

An early owner of Springfield was Mr Alfred Walter Adams, advocate, a shareholder in Dumbell's Bank.

When his wife died in 1878, he sold the house and all its contents in a four-day sale which included 'an Open Victoria Phaeton, a game cart, a set of new silver-mounted harness, oil paintings, Brussels carpets, an old Japanese cabinet and very old and valuable china together with very superior mahogany bedsteads, marble washstands, feather beds, table linen, etc.'

The next occupant was Mr Lewis Llewellyn Vulliany, a widower, of private means, with a young daughter.

He paid £2,000 for the house, shortly afterwards remarried and had several other children, including a pair of twins, all born at Springfield.

Mr Vulliany was a church warden of Braddan Church, and very involved in raising money for the church tower.

His wife joined the other ladies in the area raising money for good causes, including housing for Gentlewomen in Reduced Circumstances.

The Vullianys lived at Springfield until they left the island in 1898.

Mr William Brearey, a retired chemist, bought Springfield in 1898, and moved into it with his wife and small family. Ill-luck dogged them, a daughter was born at Springfield in 1900





