

BUILDINGS AT RISK

The island's chapels – a saving grace?

Our Buildings at Risk series covers buildings and structures at risk, lost, and saved, including the ways some can find new sustainable lives when no longer needed for their original purpose. The island's chapels fall into all these categories. This week Frank Cowin looks at some of their history and how, when no longer needed for worship, fortunate ones have secured new lives as dwellings or fulfil useful roles as workshops or stores; how some have suffered neglect or demolition; and how some are now at risk.

Among the buildings currently at most risk are the island's churches and chapels. The parish churches with their burial grounds have a degree of inherent protection, although this is not absolute as shown by Lonan and even more so by St Mary's Ballure. These, however, are a separate and complex concern, as opposed to the Methodist chapels and Anglican chapels of ease.

Methodism in the Isle of Man since its early days – just before John Wesley's first visit in 1777 – has had just over 200 places of worship.

Some of these were in farm buildings or members' homes and not all can now be located with any degree of certainty.

Even where a modern chapel has the same name as on the original circuit plans – the quarterly lists of where

preachers were due to hold services – they are not now necessarily where that original building was.

By the end of the Second World War in 1945, the number of chapels in use was about 100 and at present some 31 are still active.

In part, the large numbers are because of the split over the years of a number of groups away from Wesleyan Methodism.

In the case of the Isle of Man, it was the Primitive Methodists who felt that Methodism had moved away from its original roots in the early 1820s, and wanted greater freedom to preach in the open air as indeed John Wesley had originally done.

A much smaller group who missioned the Isle of Man in the 1880s, despite having broken from the Wesleys some 100 years before, were the Methodist New Connection.

They however only had four known meeting places in the island.

In Ramsey they met in the Hallelujah Hall, at one stage the Band of Hope Hall and more recently a shop, for a period occupied by the Manx Electricity Authority.

They also had meeting places, at addresses unknown, in Laxey and Castletown, but the only building erected for them was a chapel built in 1889 in Derby Road, Douglas, principally to meet the needs of the growing number of summer visitors.

But by 1914 the building had been sold and became the

Church Hall for St Thomas's, in whose parish it was situated. Since then it has been the Red Cross Hall and more recently the home of the Douglas Town Band.

The Primitive Methodists, or 'Prims' – often referred to as 'The Ranters' because of their forceful preaching – almost matched the number of Wesleyan buildings, so that the Methodist chapels could be said to march two-by-two through the countryside.

Indeed, it is said that A.W. Moore was asked by King Edward during his 1902 visit to the island: 'Tell me, Mr Moore, what are these buildings we often see at the cross roads – they are too large to be houses but too small to be factories?'

These of course were Methodist chapels, but those which had replaced the originals for both Wesleys and Primitives who in their early years built small buildings.

In both cases the original chapels were built so as to be able to be easily converted into dwellings.

The thinking behind this was that if the cause prospered, they could build a bigger dedicated chapel nearby and use the original chapel as a Sunday school or hall.

But if the cause failed, then there was an asset which could readily become someone's home.

This scheme sometimes went wrong when the building was on land donated by a sup-



These two photos show different views of Lhen chapel in the north of the island – is it a sleeping beauty? The above images is from 1990 while the below shot is from this year



porting landowner 'for so long as it remained a Methodist preaching house'. An example of this is the site Cronk-y-Croghee at Michael.

The conservation nature of the building programmes can be seen many times over

across the island. A good example is at the Cooil where the original chapel built in the 1790s on the 'east' side of the road was rebuilt in 1834, and then in 1870 replaced with a new chapel on the opposite side of the road.

A similar sequence happened at Barregarrow where there was a chapel in 1798 which was replaced in 1816 to honour a site at which John Wesley had preached.

The present chapel – still in use – dates from 1880 and the



The former Dhoor Chapel - which is now a dwelling - that was used by renowned Manx poet TE Brown as a setting for part of his remembrance of Chalse-a-Killey



The former Garey Chapel on the Jurby Road, built in 1833 - a good example of the non-chapel appearance of small chapels built at that period



Ballakaneen, Andreas - there was a chapel on this site since at least 1782. The original chapel was replaced in 1863, and this building – the Sunday School – was added alongside in 1880. This became used as the chapel in 1982 when the chapel alongside was demolished. Now closed and converted to a dwelling



Former Leodest Chapel (in Andreas) which has since been sympathetically converted to a dwelling

Sunday school building opposite is dated 1901 and is now a workshop (see Buildings at Risk, Isle of Man Examiner, April 3, 2018).

Both Cooil and Barregarrow chapels have the pews tiered in the style of a lecture theatre, a pattern also followed in some of the other single-storey Manx chapels.

Three very similar former chapels in the north of the island are just off-square, with the roof sloping to all four sides and with only a very short length of horizontal ridge.

The first to be built appears to be that at the Lhen erected in 1825 to replace a meeting place in use in 1798, with worship ceasing in 1981. It seems to have seen very little use since and is now cloaked in ivy.

Leodest – just north of Andreas – was also a meeting place in 1798. The building dates to 1835 and when worship ceased it was used as a farm store, but in recent years has been altered into a dwelling.

The chapel at the Dhoor – between Ramsey and Regaby – was built in 1839 and is the setting for part of the narrative poem by T.E. Brown com-

memorating with regret the death of Chalse-a-Killey:

**'And do you remember, Chalse,
How at the Dhoor -
Near Ramsey, to be sure -
I got two painters
painting in the chapel
To make with me a congregation?'**

This building was converted into a dwelling soon after worship ceased.

Some of the conversions to dwellings of the older chapels can be difficult to recognise at first sight. Raby, Patrick, Knocksharry and the Garey (Lezayre) are perhaps good examples of this.

With other buildings, their original use is much more obvious - examples include Santon Memorial, Upper Foxdale, Smeale (Andreas), Glascoe (Bride), and both Laxey Glen Road and Minorca.

Examples of larger chapels altered to create apartments are Christian Street, Peel, and the as-yet uncompleted Buck's Road, Douglas.

Relatively few have been demolished either for redevelopment of the site or area; but those that have include



Ballaugh - (left) the original chapel in the Glen Road where John Wesley conducted a service; and right, its replacement on a larger site to the north of the village centre. Both have now been converted to houses



Willaston, one of the only two chapels built since the Second World War. A number, of course, have found a continued use as stores, garages and the like.

The only two existing buildings known to have been used by John Wesley during his visits are Bridge Street chapel, Peel – now a youth centre – and Ballaugh old chapel alongside the upper glen road, which is now a cottage.

Neither of these buildings

is currently registered.

The latest chapel to cease worship is Kerrowkeel which appears to be the oldest chapel still in Methodist ownership, having been built in 1814.

As its name suggests there was a keeill, an early earth and stone chapel erected about 1,000 years ago on the adjoining land.

Nearby is a battle site where some 40 Manxmen were slaughtered in 1316 by an invading party of Irishmen led

by Richard de Mandeville.

A little further up the slope of South Barrule is where John Wesley preached on the hillside during his visit in 1781.

The Triskelion Way Pilgrim Route from Rushen Abbey to Maughold via the cathedrals at Peel passes the door.

The chapel is a welcome half-day's walk calling point for walkers.

The Manx Methodist Historical Society along with Pilgrimage Isle of Man and

the committee of Praying the Keeills are attempting to put together a scheme which would mean its doors can be kept open to welcome passers by and where special services, events and displays can be housed.

● For more information, or if you feel you can help towards this in any way, please contact afoxon@iom.com or Andrew Foxon, 39 Droghadfadyle Road, Port Erin IM9 6EN.



Glascoe Wesleyan Chapel in Bride, which was built in 1856 at a cost of £160. It closed as a chapel in 1965



Smeale in Andreas. The original chapel was built in 1831, while the replacement - costing c£500 - opened May 16, 1880. Now a dwelling but unmistakably a former chapel



Kerrowgarroo Wesleyan Chapel in Andreas. The original chapel with a gable to the road was built 1819 before a new chapel built was 1860. The building is now a dwelling