

## BUILDINGS AT RISK

# Arrival of the Sea Terminal marked new era for harbour

*Buildings at Risk looks at our built heritage around the island, and how buildings and structures can evolve with changing circumstances. This week Frank Cowin of the Isle of Man Natural History and Antiquarian Society continues its look at the changing needs of ferry users – on foot or in vehicles – and how the Sea Terminal came about and has evolved since*

**T**he war years saw a great deal of activity in Douglas harbour but there was not much physical change to it.

There was certainly a lot of coming and going of naval vessels of all varieties.

On the other hand, most of the Steam Packet vessels had been requisitioned and after an encounter with a mine in the Mersey, the service was switched to Fleetwood which had previously only been used during the summer months.

On a few occasions, Merchant vessels and their escorts were seen gathering off Douglas prior to leaving Britain in convoy for other parts of the world - these ships of course did not enter the harbour.

However, in the run up to D-Day there was a steady flow of various types and sizes of Landing Craft which did. Douglas seemingly was a 'hand-over' port for them. They usually arrived quietly late in the day, sometimes staying for 24 hours or so before vanishing overnight.

On one occasion a burned-out cargo vessel which had been abandoned off the island was towed into the harbour and lay alongside the Coffee Palace berth for some weeks.



The Sea Terminal officially opened on July 6, 1965

Regularly seen waiting to leave the island were low-load trailers carrying the remains of aircraft which had crashed on or in the vicinity of the island.

Some of the cargo vessels visiting Douglas were fitted

with mini anti-aircraft barrage balloons; and on one occasion the winding mechanism was obviously being tested when the balloon broke free and was last seen heading in a South-Easterly direction.

Some of the vessels brought livestock to the Island, landing them on timber staging on the inside of the breakwater. Many of these ships were Irish, and therefore neutral, and had large Irish flags painted on the sides of their hull.

At the start of the war, Cunningham's Holiday Camp was requisitioned to become the Royal Navy Boy Entrant establishment under the name of HMS St George. The recently completed and still unused Ballakermeen School became their classroom space.

The blocks of boarding

houses on Loch Promenade (one each side of Howard Street) were also requisitioned to become the accommodation blocks for the Royal Navy's Radio and Radar Training School under the name of HMS Valkyrie.

They used the then Douglas Head Hotel, and built what is now Manx Radio as their classrooms and technical areas.

Later in the war the Empress Hotel and a further promenade area were taken to become HMS Valkyrie II.

All the naval personnel had to undergo training in rowing and sailing in ships' boats and this was carried out in and around the harbour and bay.

This was especially important in case they were torpedoed and had to take to the lifeboats in mid-Atlantic.

The cutters and whalers

were stored in a building situated on the Approach Road below Fort Anne and were launched and recovered using 'davits' – like ships' lifeboats – mounted on the Fort Anne Jetty.

Also based in Douglas Harbour were two Air-Sea Rescue launches which had cradles at the top end of the harbour alongside the Tongue.

Unfortunately on one occasion a call came for their use when the tide was out and they could not respond.

After that, one was stationed at the landward steps on the inside of the Victoria Pier. The same steps that were used before the war, and for some years afterwards, by the ferries taking holiday makers across the harbour to the Battery Pier to savour the delights of the stalls along their route up

the headland to the Marine Drive, the Camera Obscura, and the open air theatre.

**T**he end of the war saw a surge of visitor numbers before the onset of cheap package deals diverted much of our usual market to the south of France and other sunny climes. However for a while the likes of the end of 'Scotch week' saw queues of people four-deep stretching from the harbour to the War Memorial.

The 'triangle building' was very run down and clearly could not be upgraded to deal with the situation.

An architectural competition for ideas for the scheme was supposedly held and out of the few entries said to have been submitted that chosen was by Ron Evans a young



Concept drawings, covered walkway on the foreground, and no 'Roll-off' linkspan





New columns on the left, remains of the 'triangle building' on the right

iMuseum



Used by the community, not just ferry passengers - a 1968 Douglas Band concert in the waiting hall

iMuseum

surveyor employed by Davidson, Marsh and Co, Architects and Surveyors.

The brief for the scheme was given to that firm, working in conjunction with Tom Kennaugh whose firm normally carried out such work for the Harbour Board.

Almost all of the work was carried out in the Davidson Marsh office, with Ron Evans as the job architect, with the full oversight of the partners and support by all of the staff.

The building structure is concrete with brick and window infills between the structural posts. The three arms (or 'legs') of the building being corridors on two levels as passenger movement or entertainment space and set out as parts of three interlocking circles.

In the hollow of one of the circles is the waiting Hall - to hold 1,000 - and facilities for them. The top-level was designed as a restaurant to seat 120 people and giving

panoramic views. Contrary to the belief of some it never revolved.

The original design shows the top floor with a flat roof with a slender spire rising from it. This design was changed as drawings progressed so giving the appearance which led to the nickname of the 'lemon squeezer'.

A scheme was approved by Tynwald on May 17, 1960 and for the presentation to members a model was made of the area set out on four full-size flush doors.

Building work and demolition of the old triangle building started on September 20, 1961.

It was a difficult site because the pier had to be kept in use, and also because of the amount of traffic in the area.

Peveril Square was the terminal point for the Circular route of the Douglas Corporation buses which were painted yellow. Promenade routes terminated on the promenade, and the 'up town' routes ran between a point close to the Jubilee Clock in Victoria Street and their Garage in York Road, this had originally been the Engine House and 'sheds' for the Douglas Cable Railway.

All the Promenade - Lord Street traffic and much of the traffic to and from the arriving and departing Steam Packet boats had to pass through the square and adjacent areas. Consequently the site survey and the initial setting out of the building had to be carried out in the mornings starting about 5.30 and finishing around 8.30am when the traffic for the 9am boat reached its peak.

One of those involved in this and who also designed the passenger shelter for the realigned tramlines was Stan Basnett who went on to be the last person to hold the title of 'Surveyor General' of



Demolition of the 'triangle building' - what happened to the clock? (iMuseum)

the island's highways.

The building contract was won by McCormack and Davies Ltd of Braddan, with the concrete structure being cast and stressed by Rural Industries led by Roy Gardner.

The system for the framework and floors was a mixture of pre and post-stressed concrete designed by a firm called Gifford Udall.

This type of work was new - certainly in the Isle of Man - and meant that the reinforcing steel work was already put under stress before being put under load. This enabled slimmer columns and beams of greater strength to be used.

In post-tensioned work a duct was left through the concrete and the reinforcing wires put through it. One end of the wires was firmly fixed and a powerful jack used to pull, and stretch, the wires which were then firmly clamped and the duct filled with grout and allowed to set before any supporting formwork was removed.

A simple practical example of this is picking up a line of books by clamping them between your hands - too little pressure and everything falls apart!

The official opening was by HRH Princess Margaret, Countess of Snowdon on July 6, 1965 and was followed by an official luncheon in the Crow's Nest restaurant as the upper circular floor had been named.

Since then it has been a story of almost continuous change.

First the ground floor end of one wing was taken to become a left luggage office, later this space was extended and became the offices of the Tourist Department and is now the Welcome Centre. The end of the other 'inland' wing became an office for the Highways Department and is now the office for the Promenade works.

The whole of the first floor has become offices, and the designed open space under the Crow's Nest enclosed for yet more offices. The Crow's Nest itself was taken over by Harbour Control and more offices.

The ground floor restaurant spilled out to a coffee bar in the Waiting Hall, and this has now been enclosed and both areas have become Costa Coffee, while the seaward end of this area is now WH Smith's shop.

The coming of roll-on, roll-off vessels brought the need for a marshalling yard and the infill to Circus Beach and beyond which led to the loss of the viaduct sheltered passageways and their replacement with a towered bridge at the seaward end of the Sea Terminal building.

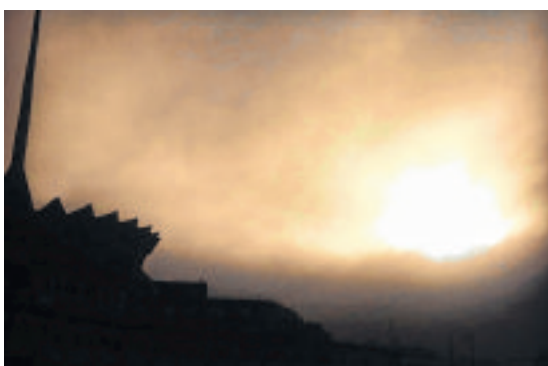
A sales office and baggage drop-off has closed off much of the large windows to the harbour in the waiting area, and a 'luggage pickup conveyor' takes up much of the space in the seaward arm of the building. Buses no longer use the Sea Terminal as a pick-up and drop-off point and coaches have been moved to the side parking area.

A building has to change to accommodate new conditions and working practices and in this case certainly has. Much has been driven by security needs but economy and use of under-used space plus catering to travellers and local needs also figure in the pattern of change.

However, throughout, it remains an important landmark building, which slots into the harbour side landscape well from where you view it.



The 'three-legged' design as revealed to the nation in the Isle of Man Daily Times on May 17, 1960. The model, as displayed to Tynwald members, was constructed on four flush-skinned house doors



An iconic part of the Douglas skyline

David J. Radcliffe