

## BUILDINGS AT RISK

# A look at Douglas in 1865

This week Frank Cowin of the Isle of Man Natural History and Antiquarian Society analyses another remarkably architecturally accurate painting, from circa 1865, which portrays the expansion and evolution of Douglas.

A double-page picture in the 'DOUGLAS CENTENARY ALBUM' published in 1997 is, at first sight, remarkably like Meredith's 'View of Douglas' published in 1805 and which was the focus of the BAR article entitled 'Looking Back at Douglas in 1805' in the Examiner a fortnight ago on January 12.

This one, however, is labelled as 'View from Douglas head, 1870, Artist Unknown'. It has been drawn from a point very close to that used by Meredith, but a little further uphill.

Unlike that of Meredith, this view includes five groups of figures in the foreground who are, with the exception of one couple dressed in their Sunday best, enjoying the view.

The children of one party are perhaps distracted by something they have seen in the gorse. Another lady and gentleman, not as well dressed as the others, are having things in the view pointed out to them by perhaps a farm worker accompanied by his dog.

The picture, however, does not show any evidence for the start of building the Victoria Pier which commenced in 1868, with the pier opening in 1873. Nor does it show any sign of the 'Iron Pier' opposite

Broadway which was built in 1869 and removed again in 1894.

It should therefore be dated as perhaps having been drawn about 1865, some five years or so before the claimed date.

It shows how much Douglas had altered and extended in the 60 years that had elapsed since Meredith produced his view of Douglas.

On the south side of the harbour it shows the upper storey of some seven or eight dwellings on Head Road. Not as visible are the roofs of Holmes Bank and some of the adjacent buildings.

As the photograph of 'Holmes Bank losing its lid' in the previous article shows, the Red Herring Houses had already been demolished and Corlett Sons & Cowley warehouse built.

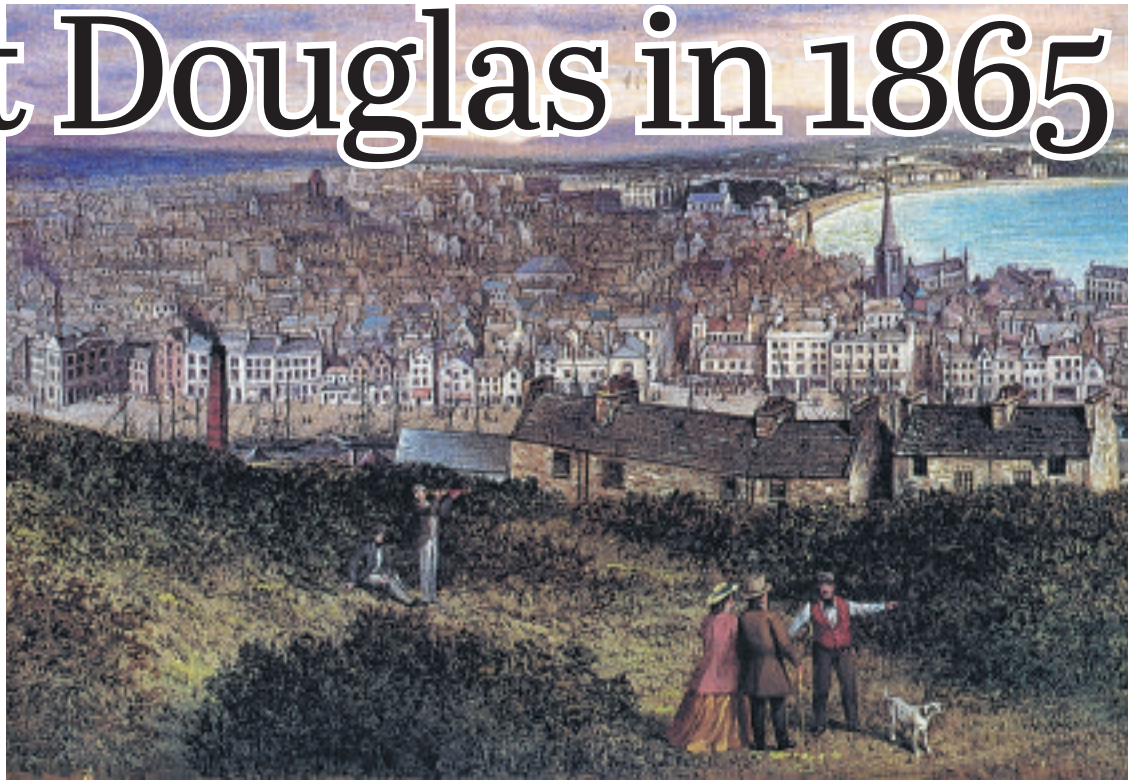
Another change is the addition of the Tower of Refuge on Conister, or St Mary's Isle, the foundation stone of which had been laid with due ceremony by Sir William Hillary.

On that same day, according to John Welch the architect, the Castle Mona had opened as a hotel.

It had been built for the Duke of Atholl at the start of the century and can be seen, with its central tower, across the Bay.

However, perhaps the most obvious change is the six-storied Imperial Hotel at the foot of the Red Pier. In later years, as the offices of the Steam Packet Company, it was known as Imperial Buildings.

Next to it on the foot of the Red Pier is the small group of George Steuart buildings which managed to survive the alterations which changed the



(Above left and right) 'View from Douglas head, 1870, Artist Unknown'

Red Pier into the Edward Pier.

At the rear of these there still survives a wall of the red sandstone which gave the pier its name; this is best seen from the entrance to the marshalling yard.

On the other side of the Imperial Hotel, an open-fronted shed has been added in front of the original buildings at the point which had become the Steam Packet goods wharf. The shed disappeared again when the buildings behind were replaced with buildings more suited to goods handling.

Part of the area was nearly lost to the Steam Packet in 1890 when a scheme to provide a high-level bridge across the harbour had progressed as far as having a foundation

stone laying ceremony, but that is perhaps a story for another day!

In some ways it has since been echoed by the high-level pedestrian bridge over the harbour/marshalling yard area to get passengers safely from the booking-in facility in the Sea Terminal to the Ro-Ro berth.

Around the corner facing up the harbour is what became part of the Royal Hotel, again later to be used as offices for the Steam Packet.

It supposedly had been built by the Bacon family who owned Staward Farm at Sulby and Seafeld at Santon, later the Arragon Hotel and then Arragon House. The Bacon family used a rebus of a boar to mark their properties and on

their monument in St Peter's Church in Onchan.

The buildings along the harbour are drawn in some detail with a number of changes, but remaining largely unchanged from the Meredith drawing are the Douglas Hotel and St Matthew's Church.

Alongside the Douglas Hotel, the Lord's Store has been replaced with two properties, one of which was for some years The Farmers' Combine shop whilst the other eventually became the Clarendon Hotel which ultimately acquired its neighbour and the site redeveloped as a single building.

There is a small crowd of people outside St Matthew's, enough to suggest that some stalls were trading but cer-

tainly not enough to suggest that the weekly market was under way.

By this time the Market Hall in Duke Street, designed by local architect John Taggart (see BAR, Examiner of Feb 19, 2019) and now part of the Marks and Spencer site, had been built but the farmers were reluctant to pay to use it, preferring to stay outside on the old site and risk getting wet.

This led, after the clearances of the 1890s onward, to the cast iron market, part of it serving as the Fish Market and now the Legion Club, and also the New Market which is now Noa Bakehouse.

The detail of the buildings behind the harbour frontage has been somewhat 'fudged'



Some of the splendid seafront terraces



Crowds outside the Athol Street Tynwald Chamber (later Douglas Courthouse) to hear results of the first democratic House of Keys election in 1866



Manx Museum Art Collection



(Above) The Imperial Hotel, with the Steam Packet goods wharf/sheds left and (below) Steam Packet goods wharf and covered loading area

Both images courtesy of the iMuseum



but it is possible to pick out some of the more important buildings and also the extent to which the town had expanded.

Along the seafront there is of course no sign of the Promenade Scheme nor any signs of Victoria Street 'bulldozing' its way through the jumble of the old town.

One large building (directly above the left-hand gable of the terrace of three houses on Head Road) is probably Thomas Street Methodist Chapel, also designed by John Taggart, which in its original form shared many of its design features with the Market Building.

However, after Victoria Street was created alongside it in the 1870s the chapel was revamped both inside and out to emerge as Victoria Street Methodist Church.

Very prominent in the picture is St Barnaba's Church with its spire and its East end abutting Fort Street very close to the old sea wall.

A little to the right of St Barnaba's Church can be seen a large and tall building outlined against the sea. This was the Douglas Hospital and its first matron was Nellie Brennan (buried in St George's churchyard) appointed in reward for her services in the 1832-33 cholera epidemic.

It was in the aftermath of the cholera epidemic that Douglas got its first piped water supply from a reservoir in the middle of what is now Summerhill Glen.

That reservoir was only filled in a few years ago which eliminated the old waterway which had continued in use

after the 'new' reservoirs were built, to serve the hydraulic engines powering the early lifts fitted in hotels such as the Sefton and at the Masonic Hall in Castle Street, and also the organs at St Thomas' Church and Victoria Street Church.

Until the reservoir was filled in, it also served water to keep the Promenade Gardens from drying out.

Almost alongside St Barnaba's is the island's Records Office built to hold the old deeds and other papers when they were moved from Castle Rushen to Douglas.

This eventually became the first Town Hall for Douglas and had a second storey added.

Later it became the Customs Office and eventually known as Seneschal House before its demolition.

By 1865, Douglas had well and truly 'jumped the raised beach period' cliff line, not only to a fully-developed Athol

Street where the first building completed was the National School which went through a number of other uses before its demolition and its replacement with a building carrying the name Heritage Court.

Visible on Athol Street is what must be the rear of the former Court House originally built for the Friendly Societies on whose behalf the foundation stone was laid by Sir William Hillary. At about the time of the picture it was being used as the temporary home of the former Court House originally built for the Friendly Societies on whose behalf the foundation stone was laid by Sir William Hillary. At about the time of the picture it was being used as the temporary home of the former Court House originally built for the Friendly Societies on whose behalf the foundation stone was laid by Sir William Hillary. At about the time of the picture it was being used as the temporary home of the former Court House originally built for the Friendly Societies on whose behalf the foundation stone was laid by Sir William Hillary.

It is now a licenced premises. Sir William was buried in a vault in the nearby burial ground surrounding St George's Church which is difficult to spot amongst the press of other buildings surrounding it.

Not hidden is the newly-built St Mary of the Isle with its distinctive towers opened

in 1859 which replaced St Xavier's at the corner of Athol Street and Prospect Hill, originally built by the Methodist Friendly Society and which also served as a small theatre.

Close to the sea, and backed by the trees of the Villa Marina estate, can be seen St Thomas' Church. Designed by Ewan Christian and completed in 1849, its opening was delayed by a dispute, as had the opening of St George's much earlier, regarding who had the right to appoint the Clergy to serve in them.

Ewan Christian was the first and so far only Manx-related person to be President of the Royal Institute of Architects, and was by some margin the most prolific Ecclesiastical architect of the Victorian period.

To the left of St Thomas' can be seen Windsor Terrace and Derby Square with

the streets and roads beyond them leading up to Woodbourne Road.

At the far end of the bay can be seen the Summerhill/Strathallan development, the seafront part of which had been encouraged by the Duke of Atholl during the last few years in which he still held the Manorial Rights to the island and the title of Governor in Chief.

The first four houses, the terrace nearest the tram station, were known as East Mona Terrace; but that was changed by the Duke's daughter Amelia who was married to John Drummond when he took the title of Lord Strathallan in 1824.

It has been Strathallan Crescent ever since.

The properties were intended as houses to rent by families for the summer season when the whole family,

including the children and at least some of the servants, would travel to the island.

Within the last 25 years the internal layout of some of the properties still showed evidence of this!

The earliest properties built specifically as boarding houses are to be seen on the seafront to the right of St Barnaba's spire.

These were at the other end of the Duke's seafront estate and are from left to right Clarence Terrace, the Esplanade, and Derby Terrace.

The construction of these terraces, along with the start of the Marathon Road area seen above them - originally called Woodville but nicknamed 'New Jerusalem' - marked the break-up of the estate that the Duke of Atholl had acquired around his 'Ducal Palace' - the Castle Mona.



The National School on Athol Street, designed by John Taggart



Clarence Terrace