







Proud workmen prior to opening of the Ramsey Hydropathic Establishment in 1897

Nigel and Nikki Sperring

the island at the start of the 20th century after the failure of Dumbell's bank, but the impact of Great War and then the following depression resulted in the business being placed in the hands of a receiver in 1924 – unfortunately the first of many occasions that was to happen.

The eventual purchaser was a company promoted by Mr CHH Mitchell of Notting-

ham. Again, this was a trend to be repeated, those who perhaps had vacationed at the Hydro were seduced in the manner of many holiday romances, seeing the Hydro busy in season but not realising the burden of keeping such establishments running out-of-season.

Mr Mitchell's company carried out major improvements, including 38 more bedrooms,

garaging for motor cars, electric light throughout, but by December 1927 the Hydro was back in the hands of a receiver.

During the 1930s the Hydro was relatively successful as a seaside hotel, including use by the families of Territorial Army officers on their summer camps (including one Bernard Montgomery, later of Alamein fame). After the second World War, the Hydro's fortunes



The St Andrew's brine baths at Droitwich spa

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ebbed and flowed like the tide, but eroding gradually like the cliffs of the High Shellag to the north.

Although the Saltworks was in decline post-WWII, the Manx government propped up both the Manx Salt and Alkali Company and the Ramsey Hydro hotel in hope of promoting resurgence in tourism for brine bathing as cure for rheumatism.

Passing through a series of liquidations and new owners, the Hydro was relaunched as 'The Grand Island' in 1962 under new local ownership but with Government support.

The whole hotel was modernised, central heating installed, some rooms made en suite, new kitchens built and a new entrance constructed through one of the former Beachmount's bay windows.

The large seaward-facing dining room, where many readers will recall attending functions, was built by Parkinsons in 1964.

When the Hydro/Grand Island celebrated its centenary in 1997 hopes were high; but it finally closed in 2009 and was demolished in 2012, to be replaced by a modern housing estate and a soulless box on the Mooragh promenade.

**F**ollowing publication of the previous instalments on the Saltworks, the author has received a number of queries:

#### ARTESIAN BRINE

Whilst the eye-catching headline was a (very modest!) 'run' of brine from the first test borehole at the Point of Ayre, the real discovery was the layers of crystalline salt.

As explained previously, the geology wasn't conducive to mining, but bringing the salt to the surface as brine was relatively easy.

There has been a suggestion that there was a massive underground lake of brine, but not only was there no sign of that in the test bores, the salt was between layers of clay and other seabed/glacial debris which would not support the 'roof' of a brine lake.

It has also been suggested that the brine, or at least water to dissolve the salt, reached the Point of Ayre from sources to the east (Walney Island, brine), north (the Scottish coast, fresh water) or even west (Carrickfergus, brines).

Long-distance lateral artesian flows normally require solid geology with fractures through which the water can flow. But the geology above, below and around the salt pan pockets under the Point and the north of the island is really very similar to that which is exposed on the surface, albeit with less sand.

The seabed is a layer of gravel and marl/clay and glacial/seabed debris, with in our



Fresh-water bore well-head at the Point of Ayre pumping station. The lift pump is down the borehole below the level of the fresh water table. The pump rod went down through a gland in the centre of the hexagonal nut on the left, while the fresh water was discharged through the two-inch branch that emerges to the right

case some relatively shallow but modestly wide salt pans.

Water doesn't reliably flow for tens of kilometres through the mixed fragmented geology between the Point of Ayre and the suggested sources.

The prosaic truth is that pressure of seawater above is adequate to bring the brine up to the level they found it at, as was proven by John Todd in a paper in Yn Lioar Manninagh.

#### ARTESIAN FRESH WATER

Similarly, there have been several questions/suggestions over the source of fresh water at the pumping station at the Point of Ayre. The main demand for fresh water was for the boiler which powered at least three pumps at the site.

It has been suggested there was 'a fresh water spring' but that is incredibly unlikely that a spring would rise through

the sand and gravel exactly at the pumping station.

The northern plain's water table is not far below ground level, as evidenced by periodic floods and recorded more accurately by the dip-wells across the Ayres National Nature Reserve.

The head of the fresh water bore and pump remains in-situ and visible. It has also been suggested that they had another fresh-water bore/pump further inland adjacent to the main road to the lighthouse but no evidence of this can be found.

#### SETTLING TANKS

It has been suggested that the three shallow tanks adjacent to the brine lifting pump were solar salt pans.

Although the Point of Ayre is the sunniest spot in the island, there was never enough

solar energy to evaporate brine down to salt, but see 'Pilot plant' below. It has also been suggested they were fresh water tanks / and that the brine was so pure no settling was required.

In his 1896 paper, Todd describes how the brine was 'delivered into a tank, where any earthy matter held in suspension is allowed to settle at the bottom.' The three tanks were filled sequentially by cascade, and periodically swept out. Photographs show the tank nearest the main brine lift pump being filled from a six-inch pipe, which could come directly from the brine well-head; and the central tank appears to have a brine-stained tide mark.

#### PILOT PLANT

Craine Bros established a pilot plant at the Point of Ayre,



Land in the Sulby Valley taken by Craine Bros/Manx Salt and Alkali Company

Manx Museum Library

but no plans or photographs are known.

In a paper in 1896, John Todd described the pilot plant's salt pan as '30 feet long by 13 feet wide by 18 inches deep', it would have had an iron evaporating pan but once the pan was removed, the footprint is similar to that of the settling tanks – maybe the settling tanks were built on/from the former pilot salt pan base.

#### SULBY VALLEY

Further research by the author with assistance of staff at the Manx Museum even-

tually unearthed a pre-sale agreement. It includes clauses that the grantee (TW Caine) will not quarry on the land, guarantees not to cause pollution of the river and that prior to purchase Caine's men may enter onto the site to measure the flow of the river.

From this, it would appear that Caines/the Manx Salt and Alkali Company had notions of siting some form of works on the upper Sulby river, just below where the current hydro-electric plant (fed from Block Eairy) is now.