

# BUILDINGS AT RISK

# The arrival of Bishop Wilson and Revestment

Buildings at Risk covers buildings and structures in our island: domestic and industrial - those currently at risk, those lost, and those which have survived.

Frank Cowin of the Isle of Man Natural History and Antiquarian Society continues his look at the evolution of the church and its buildings on Mann, looking at the period from the arrival of Bishop Wilson to immediately after 'Revestment'.

In this third instalment of the occasional series on Manx churches and chapels, we look at the period from the arrival of Bishop Wilson to immediately after 'Revestment'. Bishop Wilson altered and repaired Bishops court, planted trees where there had been none and improved his demesne farm to the extent that, by the 1740s, he was obtaining record crops when neighbouring farms failed. He not only learned the Manx language but translated and published religious works in it and started the process that led to the translation and printing of the Bible in Manx. The Michael area of the



Bishops court Tower block with the Thomas Brine extension to the left

island had been the home of the Bishops since before 1248 when Bishop Simon died there. The tower at Bishops court is very similar to the Gatehouse at Peel Castle and both were built in the 1390s. It was built in the style of an Anglo-Scottish Borders Towerhouse often referred to as Peele Towers. Originally it probably had a first-floor entrance, although there is now no evidence of a stone vaulted ceiling to the ground floor which would

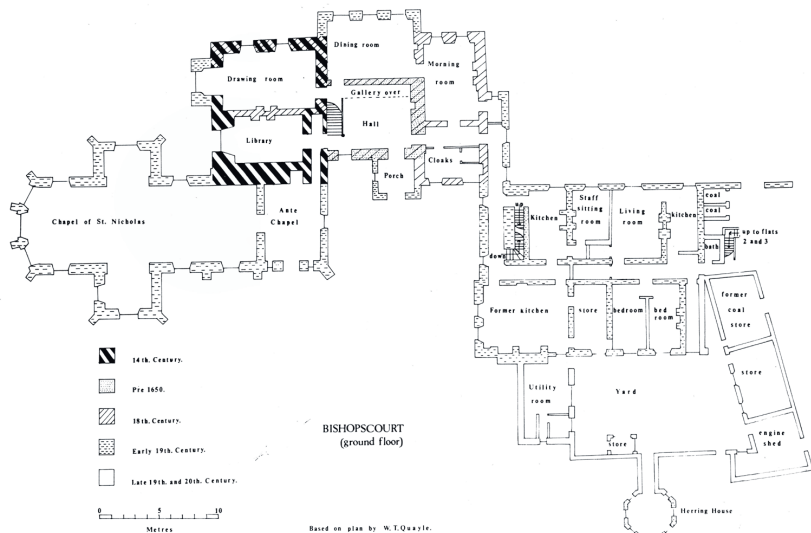
have been normal and which is still present at Peel. This tower, the 'Orry Tower' or 'Grey Tower', had a chapel added to the northeast face and a hall to the southwest face some time before 1651. During the English Civil War, the Earl of Derby used Bishops court, fortifying it further with the earthworks around what is now the garden area. When the island surrendered to the Commonwealth forces, it was occupied by the Parliamentary Commission-

ers but then seems to have been little used following the Restoration until the arrival of Bishop Wilson. By Bishop Crigan's arrival in 1788, it was again in a bad condition with the South East wall of the tower having been damaged in an earthquake. The tower end wall was taken down and rebuilt some twelve feet nearer the present road. The roof was altered to a double roof with a central valley and all the battlements removed.

When Bishop Murray arrived, he did not approve of the 'country mansion style' and he had all the battlements put back. This work was carried out by the architect Thomas Brine who extended the house and replaced the medieval chapel with one in the 'Georgian Gothic Style' abutting the northwest face of the tower. Bishop Powys arrived in 1858 and he had most of the 'Brine Chapel' demolished and replaced with a 'Victorian Gothic' building.

A fire in 1893 destroyed the remaining part of the original hall and involved more repairs and rebuilding. Other alterations and extensions followed including a wing to house the resident students at the Ecclesiastical College but, in 1979, Bishop Nicholls on his appointment decided he could not live there. As no suitable alternative use could be found for it, Bishops court - again in a fairly poor condition - was sold. A succession of private owners has lovingly restored it. It is now a private residence and the house, chapel and grounds are only open to the public on special occasions.

By the time of Bishop Wilson's arrival in 1698, the population of Castletown had grown to the point where St Mary's Chapel was too small and being used both as a church and a school. The Grammar School and the academic scholars were taught there. The academic scholars received 'further education' and were intended to become members of the Manx clergy. Their library was also housed in St Mary's. Bishop Wilson purchased properties at the seaward end of the square - the Parade - demolished them and built a new church which, in turn, was dedicated to St Mary. The old chapel was altered by removing the aisle from the south wall and filling the arches. A new classroom was



Plan of Bishops court (NB does not show 12 feet front of the tower rebuilt about 1800)



Bishops court, drawn c. 1645 (Daniel King / Manx Museum)

built onto the side of the original building and it then served only as a school.

A few years later, more ground was acquired nearby and a building erected to provide space for the academic library on the upper floor with a meeting place for the House of Keys below.

In 1820, this building was demolished and replaced by the building now known as 'The Old House of Keys'.

**A** new church for Douglas, St Matthew's, was built in 1708. There had been earlier churches because there are references to St Martin's, St Peter's and St Mary's - these had either disappeared completely or were ruinous beyond use.

The octagonal bell cote of the new St Matthew's was to be a feature of many of the churches that Bishop Wilson either built new or altered.

These included extensions at Ballaugh and St Runius (Marown) and, in 1714, a new church on a new site for Patrick to replace that on St Patrick's Isle. This new church has since been totally demolished and replaced on an adjoining site by the present church, built in 1879.

Also built, in 1733, on a new site some miles from the original was a Parish church for Lonan and again this was to be totally rebuilt 100 years later, the replacement church being consecrated in 1835.

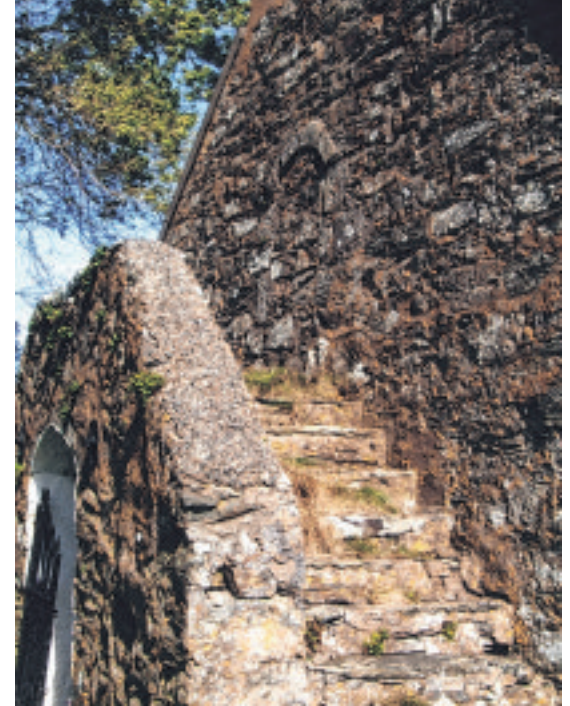
Each of the old quarterland farms, the traditional farm units, had the right to one pew in the parish church and had to pay a 'church cess', a share



Old Kirk Braddan - detail of the gable Cross still in position picturing the Crucifixion (probable late 12th century)



Bishop Thomas Wilson



The entrance porches at St Runius (pictured above) and old Ballaugh were similar, being under the twin staircases leading up to a now-sealed-up door giving access to the West gallery. The steps remain at St Runius but have been removed at Ballaugh.

of the costs of the church, especially at times of repair or rebuilding.

The Vicar or the Diocese had to meet the costs of work to the Sanctuary. The farm owners had a right of burial under their particular pew. This created fairly regular disturbance if they chose to be buried there rather than outside in the burial ground.

As a result it meant that very often there was no proper fixed seating and only unpaved beaten earth floors. It could also cause problems when older burials were disturbed.

In an attempt to stop this, Bishop Wilson ordered that there should be no more burials within churches or indeed outside close to their walls.

**A**s the population grew, one way to provide extra seating was to create a gallery as happened at Braddan in 1737. In the old long narrow plan form churches, this was at the West end with outside access by means of a stone staircase, normally on the north wall.

When music became a regular part of the church services, it was provided by a band, often a fiddle or other stringed instrument, a drum and a serpent - a long winding wind instrument - housed in

the gallery. This gave its name to the type of music used - West Gallery Music.

Later, when musical tastes and styles of worship altered and the band was evicted to be replaced by an organ, it was on the gallery that the organ was housed. In a number of the older Manx churches that is where it is still to be found.

Bishop Wilson, although offered a bigger and wealthier Diocese in England, stayed in the island until his death in 1755. His comment on the offer was: 'I will not leave my wife (the Diocese) in my old age, because she is poor'.

He had been Bishop for 57 years, a period far longer than that of any Bishop either before or since.

By the time of his death, the island was a busy warehouse supplying goods to those involved in the 'running trade'.

The trading laws and low customs duties in the Isle of

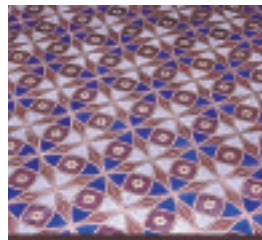
Man meant that there were large profits to be made in smuggling goods into the surrounding countries - England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

The British government brought this to an end in 1765 by what was effectively a compulsory purchase of the Regal Rights of the Lord of Mann, by then the Duke of Atholl. This purchase gave the Crown the power to control trade and customs duties in the island.

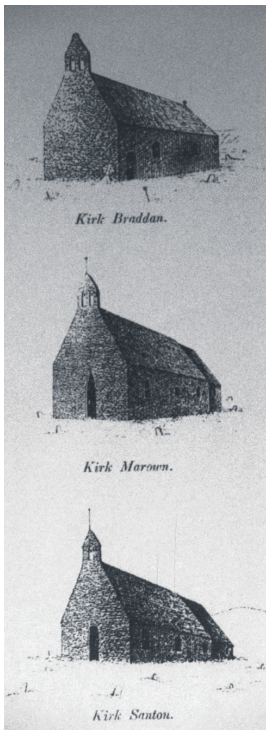
The commonly-held view is that this destroyed the trade and the economy of the Isle of Man. Certainly, it created a mass exodus of 'foreign' merchants, especially from Douglas, but the effect on the resident and farming communities seems to have been somewhat different. Before the 'Revesting Act' under which the Crown took control, many of the resident population suffered financially by the merchants not honouring their debts.

It has been suggested that this apparent discrepancy was as a result of the relationship of the 'stranger' and local merchants and their supplies of local goods.

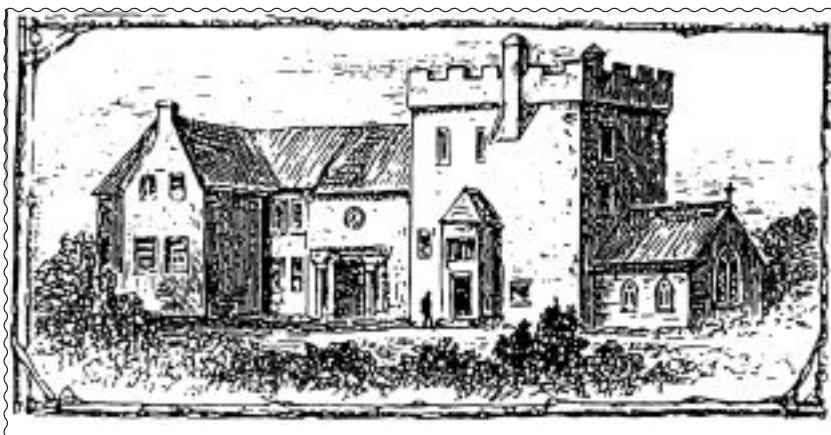
It was particularly the 'stranger merchants' who held licences from the Duke of Atholl to trade, who left the island to set up shop in Dunkirk and/or the Channel Islands.



Bishopcourt Chapel floor



Three of Bishop Wilson's churches



Bishopcourt ('Church Bells')



Bishopcourt window made up of fragments of glass found in a bricked-up former window opening

This clearly made a big impact on the island's general economy.

But merchants often went bankrupt leaving their local suppliers unpaid which - providing they could obtain other stable outlets for their goods and services - was beneficial to the individual locals.

During the early 1770s, there was a lot of activity with

regard to church building which would seem to show that the Revestment was not entirely bad for everyone.

St Mark's was a new Chapel of Ease for Malew, a secondary chapel within the parish where travel would otherwise be long or difficult; and the existing Santon and Braddan parish churches were both altered.