

BUILDINGS AT RISK

Post-Revestment and the arrival of Methodism

Buildings at Risk covers buildings and structures lost, at risk and saved.

In this fourth instalment of the occasional series on Manx Churches and Chapels, Frank Cowin of the Isle of Man Natural History and Antiquarian Society continues his look at the evolution of the Manx church and chapels.

In this article, we look at the period following the 'Revesting Act' when the Regal Rights covering the Isle of Man were repurchased by the English Crown from the Duke of Atholl and finish as the first traces of Methodism reached us.

Douglas had grown rapidly during the 18th Century but, nevertheless, was still a relatively small triangle now bounded by the North Quay, Walpole Avenue, Victoria Street and the lower levels of Shaw's Brow Car Park.

St George's was built on a greenfield site outside the town. The work had started in 1761 and the design was based on a Whitehaven Church, which had been viewed by a committee of the gentlemen of Douglas.

The Revestment in 1765



The summer house situated at Mount Morrison in Peel where John Wesley preached in 1777

meant that the work on St George's ceased in that year and the departure of the wealthy merchants, followed by financial irregularities, meant that work was not completed until 1780 and the Church consecrated the following year.

Having lost the merchants from its building committee, they were in time replaced by members of the new English administration. Perhaps because of this, St George's became known as 'the English Church' as opposed to St Matthew's which was 'the Manx Church'.

As built, St George's had a semi-circular apse, an area projecting beyond the main part of the church at the east end and housing the altar. This was later extended into a rectangle raised on pillars to avoid disturbing burials of previous years in this area.

The building has been altered and refurbished many times since, including work completed in 2009.

St George's was the first of the Manx churches to be built with a range of galleries, although they were not in the design of the original partly-built church but were added



The Apse at St George's supported on piers to avoid disturbing burials beneath

when work restarted.

Galleries were to a large extent another of the changes brought about by the Reformation and they are perhaps seen at their best in some of the great 'Wren period' parish churches in London.

As well as the high points of the services being carried out in the sight of the congregation, the sermon became the main feature of most services.

The words of the preacher must be heard and he should be able to be seen, leading to triple-decker pulpits set centrally in front of the altar, so the churches became 'audi-

tory churches', intended to stress the importance of the spoken word.

It wasn't until well into the 19th Century that the island was to get its first full auditory church but St George's saw the process start and Old Kirk Braddan is a classic example of how the old style church could be adapted to the new ideas.

Until 1839 when they were 'commuted', converted to fixed annual payment, tithes were effectively one tenth of all farm produce paid in kind.

Rectors were entitled to a full share of the tithes in their parishes, but vicars were paid

a stipend by the abbey or other such organisation, or individual, who held the right to the tithes.

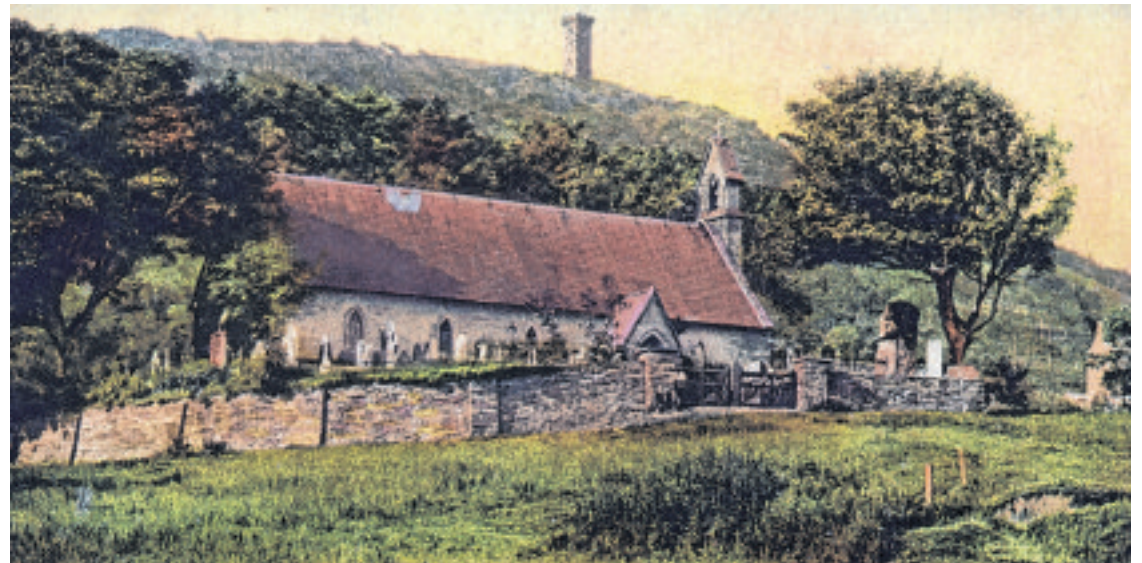
Andreas, Bride and Ballaugh were tectories while all the rest of the parishes were vicarages. In modern times, these distinctions have become more academic than practical.

Of the tectories, Andreas produced the greatest income from tithes so this was normally held by the archdeacon, the clergyman second in the diocese to the bishop.

From 1787, the Duke of Atholl, who held the right to



The old rectory at Ballaugh



St Mary de Ballure

appoint the senior clergy, appointed a succession of relatives as archdeacon and rector of Andreas.

Probably as a result of this, it was decided in 1800 to build a large new church for Andreas, but it was to be several years before the work was started and 1821 before it was consecrated.

The decision to rebuild Jurby Church was made in 1813, the old one having been deemed beyond repair seven years earlier. The new church was to be much bigger than its predecessor but very simple.

Again, it was a long time until its consecration in 1829 as consecration of church buildings cannot take place until the debts incurred are paid off. Ramsey had grown and the old town church at Ballure was in poor condition.

Fundraising started in 1814 and plans prepared in 1819 by Thomas Brine, the architect Bishop Murray had used at Bishopscourt, and the new church, St Paul's, was consecrated in 1822.

It stands on land that had recently been reclaimed from the lough (lake) and, as housing grew up around it, more seating was needed and a west gallery was added in 1830, the architects for this being Messrs Hansom and Welch.

In 1844, transepts and side galleries were added, turning what had been a simple building into an auditory chapel.

At Castletown, St Mary's, built by Bishop Wilson, had had a steeple added but, in 1817, a lack of adequate seats was reported as meaning that people were going to the Methodist chapel instead.

Extra land was bought, the old church demolished and a new much bigger building designed by Thomas Brine, who lived in Castletown, was erected with a gallery sweeping around three sides of the building and an organ gallery over the altar. In front of the altar was a high triple-decker pulpit.

The new St Mary's was completed and consecrated in 1826 - the full auditory church

design had arrived on the island at last. These days, this is the design we associate with the larger Methodist chapels.

Built at the same time as St Mary's, but designed by John Taggart, was Thomas Street Wesleyan Methodist Chapel in Douglas, later to become known as Victoria Street Methodist Church.

Methodism came into being around John Wesley and his brother Charles. They were sons of a Church of England clergyman, studied divinity at Oxford University and were ordained as Anglican (Church of England) priests themselves.

Whilst at Oxford, together with a number of their friends they formed the Holy Club which gained its members a number of nicknames, including that of Methodists because they followed 'a method' in both life and worship.

One man who was at Oxford with them and on the fringe of the Holy Club was Thomas Wilson, the son of Bishop Wilson.

The Wesleys felt that the church had fallen away from the path it should be following and made it their task to reinvigorate it and bring all people back to a knowledge of the saving grace of Christ.

Neither became parish priests but John always said that 'The world was his Parish'.

Despite being a Church of England priest, he could not preach in any of their churches unless specifically invited to do so by the parish priest who might be banned from doing so by his bishop.

The preaching of the Wesleys and those who joined them was seen as revolutionary and dangerous by some in authority. They went back to the practices of the early church and preached in the open air and held their meetings in houses, barns and other similar buildings.

In 1778, they built what is now seen as the 'mother church of Methodism', Wes-



John Wesley



A post-Reformation church (note the top hats thrown in the front!)



Bristol 'New Room'

Jongleur CC-BY

ley's Chapel, City Road, London - a full auditory chapel similar to the big 'Wren' churches, although Wesley himself favoured smaller circular or octagonal buildings.

Although the movement moved steadily away from mainstream Anglicanism,

Wesley continued to claim that he lived and would die a Church of England clergyman.

It was only with his death in 1791, at the age of 88, that the final break came and he left control of his movement in the hands of 100 of his preachers, a body which eventually

became the Methodist Conference, the ruling body of Methodism.

By this time, it was claimed that one in 10 Manxmen was a Methodist and one in 10 Methodists was Manx. One of Wesley's men, John Murlin, had visited the island in 1758 but without success.

It wasn't until the arrival of John Crook in 1775 that very much happened. He based himself in Peel but preached in the open air all over the island.

Regular meetings in Peel were held on the upper floor of a summerhouse in the garden of Mount Morrison - it is said that smuggled goods were stored on the floor below.

In the year of John Wesley's first visit, 1777, the group had a purpose-built chapel at Shore Road, just off what is now Peel Promenade.

This has since been through a number of other

uses and is now a youth centre.

Wesley preached in the open in the market squares - at Castletown where the Methodists also had their own rooms, in Douglas and on the shore and in the churchyard (St Peter's) at Peel.

Each congregation, or society as Methodists called them, met wherever was available to them: someone's house, outbuildings, a rented room or, when they became strong enough, their own specially-built property.

These properties were normally on small roadside plots with the building little more than a moderate single-roomed cottage.

The sites for these were often 'owned' on the basis that it would be returned if no longer needed for a chapel.

As time went on and some societies prospered, their buildings became bigger and more elaborate.



Old Kirk Braddan



St Mark's