

BUILDINGS AT RISK

‘Mill Stone Glen’ – a journey

In this latest feature in the Buildings at Risk series, Simon Artymiuk of the IoM Natural History and Antiquarian Society takes a tour of the Corony and Cornaa Valley and Ballaglass Glen to see how its rich range of buildings and ruins reflect the island's history, both ancient and modern.

The Cornaa Valley and Ballaglass Glen area is peppered with structures helping to tell the story of occupation and worship in the island over thousands of years.

Beginning high in the hills, the Cornaa river descends in just a few miles through a rugged, moorland landscape, then tumbles over rocky rapids in Ballaglass's mossy woodland before reaching a flat-bottomed valley 'claddagh', or marshy area. It then finally reaches the sea through a shingle-girt lagoon at Port Cornaa.

The names Cornaa, Cardle (used by two farms in the middle section of the valley) and Corony (originally a quarterland) are all variations of the Norse Kvernardalr – 'mill stone dale or glen'. Over time the valley has had no shortage of mill wheels of one type or another. Where the river rushes down Ballaglass Glen (Gaelic 'Green Farm' or 'River Farm'), the rocks are Lonan flags – formed from sand and mud deposited 400 million years ago and now shaped into great blocks.

It is these flags which would once have been useful for making millstones. It is believed that the original valley mill would have been of the so-called 'Norse horizontal' type.

The millstones would have been housed in an upper room and vertical axle trees would then have passed down through a rotating grindstone to a horizontal waterwheel moved by jets of water from the river entering cup-like vanes on its frame.

The most impressive archaeological site in the area is Cashtal yn Ard, on a plateau between the glen and Port Cornaa with fine views to North Barrule to the west and across to Cumbria to the east.

The site is believed to be Neolithic and to date from around 1800BC. It is a former chambered cairn consisting of a burning area for cremations and five burial cham-



Tom Gelling, a miller at both Ballaglass and Cornaa mills iMuseum

bers which were originally covered with a great mound of stones, now removed.

At the western end was a paved forecourt and a semi-circular facade of standing stones. A cutaway model in the Manx Museum shows it in its original form.

Close by at Rhenab is a roofless tholtan of traditional Manx type, with window spacing betraying the choil-lagh (hearth) at one end and bwhid suggane in the eaves (projecting stones for fastening thatch).

It is one of several such ru-



Ballaglass and Cornaa Mill by RE Wright c. 1895

Manx National Heritage

ins in the valley, betraying a story of emigration from the countryside and often from the island. Another tholtan lies half-hidden among trees close to MER tracks near Ballaglass Halt.

Within sight of Cashtal yn Ard on another hilltop to the east on the other side of the valley is Ballafayle Cairn, the remains of Neolithic burial site dating from 2000BC to 1500BC.

When it was excavated in 1926 it was described as a wedge-shaped cairn containing many stones fused by heat and with banded dry-stone walling stones on one side. Cremated bones were found inside and again there is a paved, semicircular forecourt with standing stones.

Just across the narrow lane leading from Ballajora to Cornaa is another burial site - this time a 17th-century Quaker graveyard around the remains of an ancient keeill.

In the centre stands a stone with the inscription



Cornaa Mill (on the right, now with new life as a residence) c. 1920

iMuseum

dedicated to William Callow of Ballafayle, 1629-1676, who gave the Quakers the site and 'suffered a long persecution, frequent imprisonment and finally banishment... for his faith'.

Views from this hilltop graveyard – named Rullick ny Quakeryn in Manx – extend over Maughold village in one direction and straight up the Corony Valley to Park Llewellyn and Clagh Ouyr's ridge.

It is in that bleak upland area that several more significant sites are found. Right at the head of the valley is an ancient roundhouse called Lien Eayst. The oval-shaped structure measures 23 metres across and a spring marked with stones is near the centre of it.

Nearby are several groups of hut circles or shieling mounds – either small huts of Neolithic date or upland summer living sites used in the Iron Age by farmers

practising transhumance (seasonal movement of livestock).

Nearby is the best preserved of several early Christian keeill sites in the valley – Keeill Woirey ('Mary's Church'). It measures 13ft by 9ft 6in with walls 2ft to 4ft high roughly faced with stone but with a rubble core.

Three relics from this chapel are housed in the Cross House in Maughold churchyard. Numbers 33 and 40 are stone slabs with equal-sided crosses roughly cut into one side of them.

The third, No 144, is known as Iuan Priest's slab, bearing a runic inscription translating as: 'Christ, Malachi and Patrick (and) Adamnan! But of all the sheep Iuan is priest in Cornadale.' There is also a fragment from the keeill at Ballagilley, lower down the valley, portraying a boar's head (No. 133).

Not far from Keeill Woirey

reys stands the forlorn ruin of the Georgian farmhouse Park Llewellyn, where a central chimney stack with back-to-back fireplaces indicates that it was not of traditional vernacular Manx type, although a barn abutting the house is more in the typical Manx style.

The farm was originally named Mount Atholl in honour of the Scottish Dukes of Atholl, who from 1736 were Lords of Man but in 1764 were pressured into selling the island to the crown for £70,000 with the Revestment Act.

But the family then retained many rights as lords of the manor and the fourth duke became governor in 1793, so this original naming is an indication that this farm was an 'intack' enclosure of moorland.

Manx National Heritage's Atholl Papers contain a letter from the Ramsey merchant



The old cottage in Ballaglass c. 1890

GB Cowen via iMuseum

through countryside and time



Ballaglass MER power station

iMuseum

John Llewelyn applying for the intack on which Park Llewelyn stands. In it he reveals that he was a native of Bristol but was proud of his family's Welsh roots and had settled in the island when it was a haven for 'free-traders', or smugglers.

A will also held by MNH discloses that John Llewelyn gave charitable funds to the poor of Ramsey each year after they saved him and his child when a warehouse attached to his home exploded 'through gunpowder'.

Manx historian Nigel Crowe found that, in the 1750s, John Llewelyn leased the Milntown Estate from the Christian family and part of the deal was that he had to build a new Georgian house there.

Park Llewelyn, meanwhile, was his summer retreat and farm. Sadly the house was abandoned within living memory and one of the gables has now collapsed, but a lean-to privy and small pig-sty survive.

In the early 19th-century,

Park Llewelyn yielded a Viking age find: 10 silver pennies believed to have been buried between 997 and 1003AD are on display in the Manx Museum.

In the late medieval period it was the mill at the foot of Ballaglass Glen that was most important in the valley as all residents of Maughold Parish, including the people of Ramsey, were required to grind their corn there.

In that period the area belonged to the monastery of St Bees in Cumberland, hence the naming of Rhenab (Gaelic, 'Abbot's Division'). After the Reformation these lands and the mill passed first to the Earls of Derby and then to the influential Christian family of Milntown.

As ownership of the former St Bees lands conferred the title of baron on the holders, the hilltop to the west of Port Cornaa gained the name The Barony. By the mid-16th century the Cornaa Mill had been rebuilt into a

typical Manx upland type with threshing mill and drying kiln and in 1642 it was the property of Manx patriot William Christian, 'Illiam Dhone'.

The mill ceased working in 1951 and has now been rebuilt with modern extension but the date 1503 is painted on it.

The area still has a connection with St Bees because the small 'house' to be seen huddled under the cliffs at Port Cornaa beach is where the telephone cable linking the Isle of Man to the UK goes under the Irish Sea to emerge again at St Bees, the nearest point in England to the island.

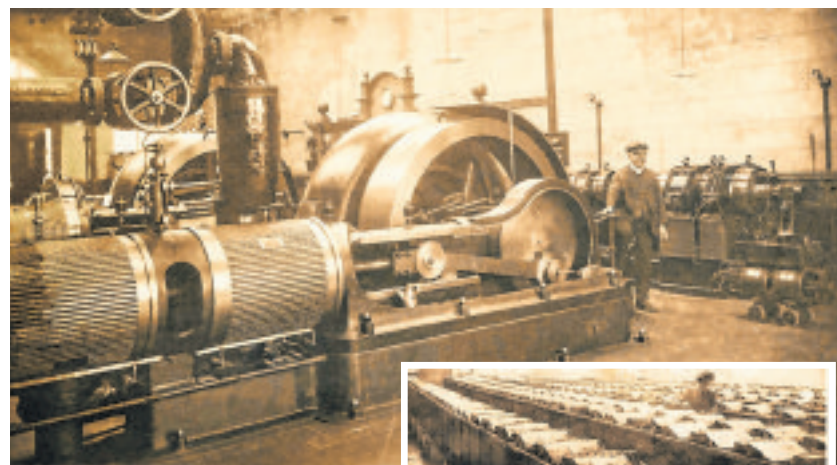
Attempts were made to make a commercial harbour at Port Cornaa in the 1790s (lime was shipped in at this time for burning as fertiliser on local farms – a limekiln survives near the Hibernian hotel on the edge of the valley) and in 1890, when a Swedish firm tried to develop a 'Bellite' explosives factory, the roofless concrete shell of which remains in the valley bottom near Port Cornaa, but these schemes came to nought.

In the mid-19th century millwheel technology was applied, as at nearby Laxey, to several metal ore mines in the valley to pump water out.

The Great Mona Mine in the upper part of Ballaglass Glen operated using a large wheel from 1854 to 1858, and again from 1866 to 1868, with large sums being expended to extract a disappointingly small amount of copper, zinc and lead. The building, minus wheel, still stands.

The Great Mona Mining Co also undertook mining trials in the sea cliffs at Ballaskeg Mine, north of Port Cornaa, and at Barony Mine, south-west of the river mouth, with even less success.

Near the top of the valley, in the cleft below Keeill



Ballaglass MER power station engines and dynamos. (Inset) the banks of batteries – predecessor to today's Tesla 'PowerWall'!

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Woirrey, the North Laxey Mine had a longer period of operation, from 1856 to 1897, exploiting a north to south lode with two shafts which reached depths of 174 fathoms (1,044ft) and 110 fathoms (660ft).

It employed two waterwheels, one, at 60ft diameter and used for pumping, was not much smaller than Lady Isabella. The other, at 30ft, was used for winding and crushing. Only 50,000 tons of low-grade lead ore surfaced.

The Glen Cherry Mine, a little further down the valley, also disappointed the hopes of its promoters – this time employing a Cornish engine and a 30ft waterwheel in

its two shafts, it lasted only from 1865 to 1875, with a brief reopening in 1889. It reached a depth of 270ft. The former Mines House is now a private residence.

A more sophisticated form of 'waterwheel' came to the valley when the Manx Electric Railway was constructed in 1897-8 and built a turbine power station in long sheds below the tracks near Ballaglass Glen halt.

In an age of horse and steam-power, this state-of-the-art form of transport must have seemed truly mind-boggling.

A surviving photograph of 1890 shows an old woman to have still been living in a tiny primitive sod and thatch

cottage up the steep hill to the south of the glen – what a strange contrast that must have been.

The power station at Ballaglass was replaced by the National Grid some years ago and is now a private house. Now only a small generating station next to the bridge at Corony keeps the water-power tradition alive in the 'mill stones valley'.

On a hillside overlooking the MER and Ballaglass Glen, a flat-roofed eco-house has been built with huge windows to take advantage of the views over the wooded valley to the sea and mountain.

A trip down the Cornaa/Corony Valley is truly a journey through time.



Bellite factory, Port Cornaa



Cashtal Yn Ard, a well-preserved chambered tomb situated on raised land overlooking the parish of Maughold

Peter Killey



North Snaefell mine, aqueduct pillars carried water to the wheel