

CULLEN: Castletown

May, 1971

Department of Town and Country Planning, Isle of Man Local Government Board

The Buchan School, Westhill

Playing Fields

Tennis Courts

Paradise Field

Builder's Yard

Victoria Road School

Chapel (Site of)

Lorne House Lodge

CASTLETOWN

Westhill Lodge

Swimming Pond

Castle Rushen High School

Derriehill

157 03 Tank

Mound

Knock Rushen

28 24

Westham

Weslham Lodge

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A preliminary outline of proposals intended for consultation only.

The reader of this report should not expect proposals for wholesale clearance and fashionable town centre renewal. The report is based on an understanding of the character or personality of the town and it seeks to coax this individuality into the new world of tourism, cars and coaches without essential damage. We believe that Castletown has a unique character which is a great asset. Do not destroy it.

Preliminary note on the Isle of Man

Resident population about 50,000, size somewhat less than half the G.L.C. area. It has been a free port for centuries and has a metropolitan, even suburban, feel about it out of all proportion to its size in spite of the 2,000 ft. mountains. In character a mixture of Liverpool, Ireland and Cumberland with Liverpool predominating, the same undemonstrative accent, subtle humour and ability to leave you alone.

It is in fact a town park on a very large scale, combining every kind of scenery with a remarkable road network and very little traffic. The Isle of Man can do for half the country what Regents Park does for London, provide an illusion of space which contains a whole range of sophisticated pleasures. The towns and landscapes are as it were exhibition pavilions in this park, providing for completely different tastes compared say, to the market towns of East Anglia which all have a basically similar rhythm. As well as the natural differences in shape and size the Manx towns need to differ in mood and temperament as well.

As indeed they do. Douglas the extrovert like a crescent setting for the Blackpool Tower that has moved fifty miles

out to sea, Ramsey a triste stray from Torbay, Port Erin and Port St. Mary a pair of middle of the road resorts, something for everyone like Hastings or Ramsgate. Castletown a toy capital, the sort of place that has achieved naturally what Port Meirion had to do with Italian trimmings. And Peel is just Peel, an introverted blend of Celtic and Norse for which I can't think of an equivalent. None of these towns will be well served by trying to make them look like any of the others. The fragility of Castletown and the introversion of Peel are their guarantee of a share in the tourist trade apart from seeming to suit the very different inhabitants of the two places, which feel a hundred miles apart and in fact are barely ten.

Report on Castletown

CASTLETOWN IS REALLY A TINY COUNTRY TOWN, an Appleby or Oakham, transplanted to Man and then balanced on a razor's edge between the fury of the sea and the alien bulk of the Castle, far bigger than anything else in the town, gathering its glacis and palms around it like something dropped in from the Riviera.

THIS TENSION IS EXTREMELY EXCITING, and could now be upset by the smallest action, the demolition of one more building, even. Because although sea and castle have stayed the same, the urban energy of the country town is slowly leaking inland from the harbour. And the town itself, quite apart from the site, is one of the best of its kind in Britain. The beautifully controlled views seawards on either side of the Church and indeed through the clear aisle windows of the Church, the formal square itself, the Doric column

without a statue put down as though Castletown was reassuring itself that it existed, the more intimate spaces further east, the way that Arbory Street and Malew Street wriggle into the central space from the north, collecting all the shops as they go. All these would be exceptional anywhere — add the Castle and the sea and it becomes truly remarkable. And we really mean this.

BUT THIS FABRIC IS EGGSHELL-THIN and to conserve it the energy should be concentrated inwards to the centre. Yet it needs very little increase above its present size otherwise the road pattern will collapse. Any ideas such as running a relief road round the back of the Church would be utterly disastrous. The permissive chaos of pedestrians and cars in Arbory and Malew Streets is as good a way as any of deterring idle traffic, as long as the townspeople do not mind, it doesn't hurt the shape and it seems to work well in winter. But summer traffic, especially the day-trip coaches will need a special park — and the relatively wide new road and attendant spaces of Farrant's Way is relatively handy.

To guard against this the car-park should be at the northern end of the yacht basin which is the nearest accessible point on the way from Douglas and a sequence of attractions deliberately created to lead from this around and through the Castle to the Square.

EXPANSION IN ANY NORMAL SENSE WOULD BE FATAL TO CASTLETOWN, it has to stay as an exquisite miniature. The Ronaldsway safety lane safeguards a lot of land to the north of the town and this should be accepted and exploited by channelling almost all expansion to Ballasalla if necessary with some financial adjustment so that Castletown doesn't

feel out of things. (It can only stay in things economically by being out of them visually.)

THE EXCEPTION IS IN USING THE LAND BEHIND THE CHURCH, facing the harbour, for two quadrangles of small houses, one open and one closed: in renovating the derelict houses to the east — both of them for full time residents, native or retired — and in using the upper floors of the shops for holiday flatlets. Manx freedom from British bye-laws would be an asset in both of these schemes.

THE TOWN URGENTLY NEEDS SINGLE ACTIONS WHICH WOULD SYMBOLISE 'MAN'S' FAITH IN IT, unlike Peel, where you feel there is enough suppressed internal energy to bury us all. Examples in various spheres are a decent tea-shop of the primmer kind, the renovation of the George Hotel to A.A. standards, repainting the Church — white or cream but nothing fancy — and the firm establishment of the harbour area as a place to live, not a site for a relief road, even if it means no more than the renovation of a single cottage. For all these 1967 would be better than 1968: there isn't a lot of time left.

The above notes were contributed by Ian Nairn.

List of Recommendations

1. No large scale development should be allowed in the town. The value of the town is in itself not as a centre for redevelopment. New housing should be contained north of the airport at Ballasalla.
2. A rigid envelope to control expansion is particularly needed at the Queen Street entrance and a belt of trees planted to shield the gauche buildings on Farrant's Way.
3. Limited and architecturally controlled new building should be undertaken east of St. Mary's Church. This to be seen as part of the renovation of the town.
4. Repainting. This will assume great importance in stimulating interest and enthusiasm. The prevailing genius of the place consists of the sinuous, echoing streets which are painted in pale, glossy colours so that the shifting moods of the sky are echoed in the streets. This has nothing to do with 'pastel shades', it has more to do with the Impressionism of 'Dawn to Noon on the Sea'. The thin, clear northern light is remote and the feeling aimed at is akin to the inside of an oyster shell. More overt ideas should be encouraged in the Square, particularly on the heavily rusticated bank or on the fascia brackets.
5. The joining together of parts which are now separate so that a corporate whole is created. By this is meant the Castle/Quay/Square system turning the present somewhat haphazard collection of squares into a living system by extending the area and emphasising the sequence by steps and surfaces.
6. If it is agreed that development be restricted the main traffic problem appears to be seasonal. It seems

possible to allow the present private car/pedestrian intermingling to continue providing the tourist cars and coaches can be siphoned off. It is proposed to develop a coach park at the head of the yacht harbour and accessible from Alexandra Road. If we think of tourists as part globe-trotter, part pub-crawler and part child we can construct a chain from this site to the centre. First the car park would have a fine view of the Castle seen over water so that there is no ambiguity, one is not decanted behind some wall in a back street. This car park would have immediate access to the model-yacht lake upstream of the weir, to a possible paddling pool below it and to a pub-cafe. Already quite a few people will be content. For the bulk who wish to explore the Promenade brings them past a beer-garden and to a popular square at the start of the quay. From there to the Castle. Also a new and more direct pedestrian way should link the coach park to the bowling green and tennis courts. It is proposed to close the road from the quay to Castle Hill and bring traffic round by the harbour side of the Castle Arms Hotel. In this way the entrance to the Castle would be traffic free. Any thought of linking this area to Farrant's Way behind the Church should be abandoned.

7. The Castle Precincts. The main attempt here is to integrate the Castle with the town, in particular the Square. In the first place it should be of more use in the social life of the town. The moat should be opened to the public, strawberries and cream under the palms. Tourist offices. Possibly a living museum with living tableaux, people being tortured in the dungeons etc. Take a leaf out of the book of the fine Manx Museum in Douglas.

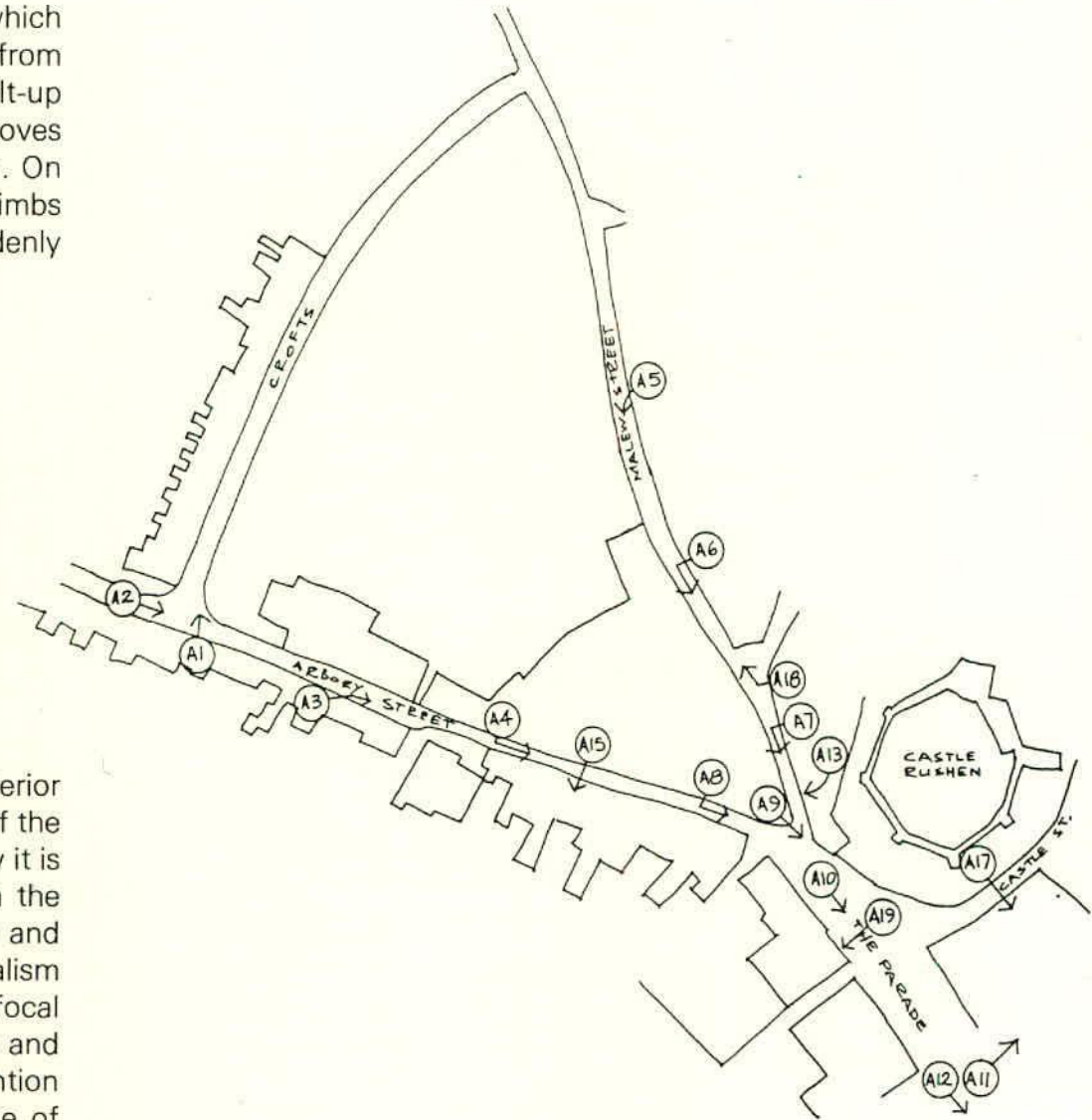
Secondly the particular nature of the Castle should govern the way in which it is made more open to the public. What is envisaged is that the circular character of the place be confirmed by creating a sort of inward spiral. The Castle is off the Square and it is, in fact, the ultimate gesture of the town. So we proposed that it be regarded as an urban form of Oozlum bird disappearing into itself by spiral foot-paths. This would mean that the town square, brave but fragile against the elements, would dissolve out into first, the sinuous streets, second the ocean and third into the Oozlum bird.

As we climb up Castle Hill from the Quayside the sloping glacis is getting nearer and nearer to the

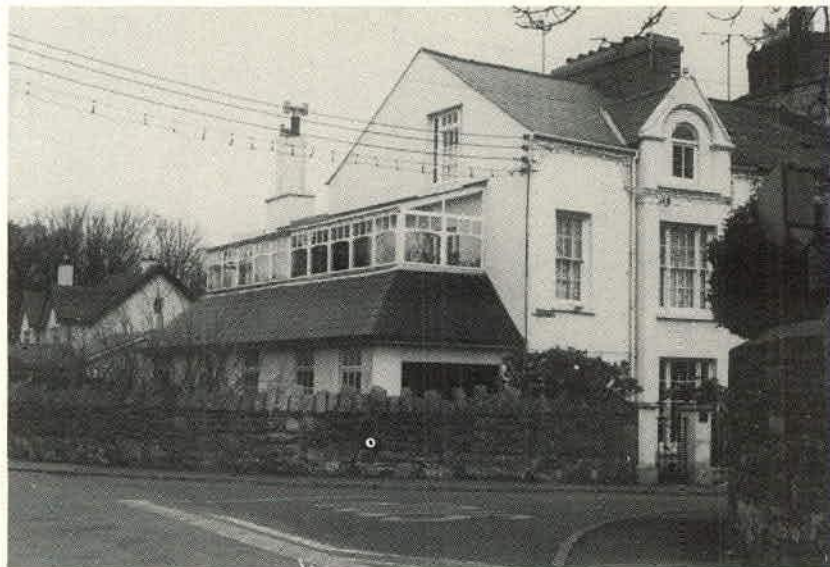
pavement and at the square it should run into the surface of the square i.e. the floor surface of the square should run up the glacis. At the same time this paving should flow down into the moat and disappear to the right. Once into the grassy moat, strawberries and cream, the pedestrian should then be able to penetrate by a new door through the curtain wall into the Castle proper so that there is a smooth flow from square to Castle. What is somewhat complicated to describe will be quickly apparent from the sketches.

Gordon Cullen 1967

THE TOWN DISPLAYS A CLEAR-CUT CHAIN which moves from the bleak hillside to green pasture land, from this to substantial Victorian Suburb and thence to built-up residential street of houses, churches and shops. This moves on to urban square and finally dissolves into the ocean. On either end of the scale there is wildness and the chain climbs slowly from hillside to urbanity but then is released suddenly into the sea. A notable sequence.



ARBORY STREET IS A FRENCH STREET, its interior polished with new glossy paint which, like the surface of the sea reflects the mood of the sky uncannily. Very narrow it is long and sinuous so that no termination is seen from the square and this, together with the exaggerated scale and intensity of the buildings, produces an effect of surrealism which is enchanting. The street, although without focal point, has incident in the succession of fascia brackets and scrolls which are of great variety and they form the invention in an otherwise orthodox pattern of fenestratio. Some of these project into the silhouette of the sinuous street and perform the work of steeple or pediment. The street terminates on Martin's Bank. Malew Street and Hope Street come into this broad category and have great charm.



A1

Arbory at the Crofts

Arbory Street



A2

Arbory Street at Methodist Chapel



A3



A4

Malew Street



A5

Malew Street Methodist Chapel



A6



A7

Malew Street at Market Place