



Silverdale and Ballasalla, Malew

Preliminary character appraisal

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For Office of Planning

January 2010

Ballabeg character appraisal:

Purpose and Scope

This Appraisal has been prepared at the request of the Conservation Officer, Office of Planning. Its purpose has been to carry out a preliminary assessment of the heritage, landscape and townscape character of Silverdale and its links with Ballasalla, with a view to establishing whether the area merits the designation of Conservation Area.

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The 1869 map of Ballasalla shows a village that may have developed around Rushen Abbey and the Abbey farms but which, in the late nineteenth century, had evolved from the utilisation of the river for industrial use and the traffic generated by the merging of roads from Douglas, St Marks, Foxdale, Ballabeg and Castletown. Ballasalla has, or had, the church, chapels, shop, post office and public house, but does not seem to have had a market place, although Smith's Directory of 1883 refers to Ballasalla's Annual Fairs being held on the '*Ancient Fair Ground*' on the fourth Wednesday in January and the Second Wednesday in August. We also have Cumming (1857) – '*Ballasalla, famous, last century, for its poultry market and the largest and most picturesque village in the Island.*'

SILVERDALE CONSERVATION AREA

The proposed area includes a range of uses, ownership and character typologies, and these need clarifying. They include:

- *Silverdale Mill and Glen* (Manx National Heritage, 1964; mill and cafe acquired later) – a Manx National Glen, with millpond, leats, and washing ladder, set in an attractive riparian woodland planted by a prior owner of the glen; Cregg Mill with waterwheel ; Cafe; boating lake (the former millpond), playground with water driven play structures (now, only the merry-go-round is water-driven) and picnic meadow
- *Millennium Way Long Distance Path* (1979) – passing through Silverdale Glen and on alongside the Silverburn River to Castletown
- *Rushen Abbey* (Manx National Heritage) - archaeological site and interpretation centre
- *Monks' Bridge* – over Silverburn River, built c1350 by the monks of Rushen Abbey to allow pack horses to cross the river
- *Ford* – Silverdale River, Ballasalla
- *St Mary the Virgin, Abbey Memorial Church*, Anglican - consecrated in 1896, limestone, plain Early English style with side bell tower, and associated buildings
- *The streetscape and older buildings of Ballasalla*, including the former mill beside the ford. Ballasalla was once described as the prettiest village in the Isle of Man.

This range of environments (recreational site, long-distance walkway, heritage sites, townscape, church) is already substantially protected by government and other ownership, and by legislation (Manx National Heritage, DAFF, Diocese; planning and environmental legislation). The question, therefore, is whether additional protection of any or all of these areas is needed or justified through the designation of conservation status.

Whilst these sites should all be protected by existing mechanisms, they could be given a coherence and basis for enhancement and protection by the designation of conservation area status. Such a designation would be beneficial for residents and for promoting tourism. The much-needed regeneration of Silverdale for tourism (or any other use) can only take place, however, if the issue of car parking is resolved. A recent attempt to create a car park in the vicinity was disrupted by vociferous protestors determined to prevent the removal of trees to provide parking spaces. As it stands, the glen and buildings are deteriorating and are badly in need of an overall upgrading of the environment, amenities and buildings.

Much could be done by the various agencies, especially MNH, DAFF, DOT and the Office of Planning, collaborating on an enhancement programme embracing landscape, heritage and townscape.

Any town planning and conservation considerations must consider how the area will evolve as an integrated recreational and tourism site; how any redevelopment, building or alteration work within the area would contribute to this amenity; how traffic management strategies can ensure that roads and parking are adequate for the traffic load without compromising the essentially rural character of much of the area; and how the townscape and landscape character can be maintained and enhanced. Much of this can be covered by strategies outlined in policy documents and the Area Plan, without the additional control of a conservation area plan.

In particular, some areas shown within the plan include bungalows and other properties that have no particular architectural or conservation merit. Inclusion could only be on one or more of three counts, (a) because their gardens back onto the river, and their frontages are on Silverdale Road, and that it was thought necessary to protect the tree-lined vista from the riverside walk and from the approach to the glen; (b) to prevent inappropriate future alteration or redevelopment of these sites; or (c) to prevent the designated conservation area from being split into two separate zones – Ballasalla, and the Cregg Mill complex.

These arguments are not usually deemed sufficient justification for designation. Normal planning policy and tree protection measures should be able to prevent inappropriate development.

A number of the buildings within the planned area are showing signs of neglect, or have been inappropriately altered. Others are more recent buildings and structures (bungalows, garages, etc) which contribute nothing to the visual or architectural integrity of the area. It would be important that any new policy established a strategy that encouraged future replacement with more appropriate forms and finishes.

The existing buildings in Ballasalla are mostly in local limestone or are rendered. There are fewer limestone cottages than in Ballabeg, but it would be important to protect the existing limestone buildings that contribute to the character of the streetscape (especially in the vicinity of the shop and the road to the ford).

It is important, also, that traffic management strategies do not dissipate the close-knit fabric in the centre of old Ballasalla by demanding that buildings be set back from the pavement to accommodate off-street parking.

The fragility of the woodland along the river is shown in the aerial photograph taken in June 2006. Wildlife habitats need to be continuous to support viable communities of plants, animals and insects. Habitat corridors need continuity from canopy to woodland floor but when they are so narrow, the loss of a single tree can be sufficient to isolate a small bird or mammal in a territory that has become too small for survival. Protection of this landscape continuity should be a major objective in this Conservation Area.

The Cregg Mill was purchased c1870 by William Quine, who ran a successful business there, milling cereals and grains. He was a founder member of the Isle of Man Arboricultural Society.



Silverdale belongs to the Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) and is managed by the Forestry Division on behalf of the Nation. The lower part of Silverdale Glen, however, belongs to Malew Commissioners and is leased to the Department to be managed as a whole. The glen is open for public access.

The Millennium Way is a public right of way and is the responsibility of the Department of Transport, Highways Division. Where part of this Way goes through the glen, day-to-day maintenance is covered by the Forestry Division of DAFF.

Industrial history - Ballasalla and Silverdale

In the past, the Silverburn River has been a significant focus for industries which relied on water or water-driven machinery. The Abbot of Rushen Abbey may have been the first person to have mills constructed in the Isle of Man. Certainly there are records of monastic mills in the 1540s, although the main mill-building period was the eighteenth century. Ballasalla Cotton Factory, c1778 was erected by Thomas Moore, Deemster, on his own land for Abraham Delapryme (variously written de la Pryme and Dalrymple) and Francis Wheelhouse.¹ It was used for spinning cotton until c1792, then for spinning thread for net-makers. A flax mill by 1818, it was later used for fulling (using water, heat and pressure to cleanse, shrink and thicken cloth, usually using a cleansing agent such as Fuller's earth).

An earlier Thomas Moore was licensed to build a walk mill upstream of his Castletown mills in 1643. This was converted to a paper mill c1760, but there is no trace of it now. There were also two other fulling mills on the Silverburn. One of these was Mullin-y-Carty, built by William Christian and Robert Keown. It was later used for carding wool. Other known uses of water power on the Silverburn include butter-churning and paper-making; the grinding of bark, powder, earth colours, polishing agents and snuff; carding (preparation of raw wool for textile manufacture), fulling (which often gave the appearance of felt) and scutching (separating flax fibres from woody stems). Water was also used in spade production and in driving several of the machines in the children's playground in Silverdale.

John Norris of the Whitestone, who was a feltmaker, died in 1709. In Pigot's directory of 1837, Ballasalla had two blacksmiths, three boot and shoemakers, one brewer, three joiners and carpenters, two millers (including the Cregg mill), two milliners and dressmakers, eight shopkeepers, one stonemason, three tailors, one tanner, four taverns (one at the Whitestone), one wood-turner, one umber & ochre manufacturer (Jas. Grellier & Co.), and a cloth scourer (Robert Mullen). There was a parochial school, but there were no doctors or surgeons. Farmers are listed by farm: only one is given as 'Ballasalla', but some may have been included in the gentry listing.

BALLASALLA is a village of prepossessing and respectable appearance, consisting of about one hundred houses; it is situate in the parish of Malew, nearly two miles north of Castletown, at the point where the Peel and Douglas roads separate. This is the largest and most English-looking village in the island; the roads in the vicinity are generally lined with neatly cut hedge-rows; and the country around being well sheltered with wood, and varied by gently-swelling eminences; the prospects, though not very extensive, are pleasing. Not far from Ballasalla are extensive limeworks, and an ochre and umber manufactory; and in the village are a tannery and a brewery. The Primitive and the Wesleyan Methodists each have a chapel, and Malew parish school is likewise here. Two fairs are held annually, on 12th August and 29th September.

Pigot's Directory 1837

Slater's directory of ten years later cribs this verbatim, except for changing the '*ochre and umber manufactory*' to '*an ochre umber and Roman cement manufactory.*' In 1857, Slater's again recycles

¹ Bawden, Garrad, Qualtrough and Scathard(1972) The Industrial Archaeology of the Isle of Man. Newton Abbot: David & Charles.

the same text, but adding mention of Rushen Abbey, *'and adjoining the ruins, is the Rushen Abbey boarding-school, a superior establishment for young ladies, conducted by the Misses Stowell.'* There are still no advocates, banks, hotels or lodging houses. The umber, Roman cement & ochre manufacturers (Torrance G. & Co. Ballasalla, North quay and Douglas -- Thomas Muncaster, manager) have risen to having a separate listing all to themselves.

Printing: There was a printing press in Ballasalla (C1840 -50), known as the "Millennial Office, Isle of Man, otherwise Woman", which produced numerous pamphlets furthering causes espoused by Mary Turnbull, a Shaker.

Gazetteer of buildings and landscape – Silverdale and Ballasalla

Cregg Mill – three storey stone-built mill with pigeon loft. Note the granite lintels and quoins, the casement windows and the entrances on two levels.



Small mill building at the end of the Silverdale millpond.



Silverdale – the millpond (now the boating lake) and the purpose-built cafe (1910).

The buildings and facilities at Silverdale have been through many changes in the last forty years, with many changes of ownership/tenancy. Regrettably, none have succeeded. People descend in large numbers during holidays, only to have a unpleasant experience because the car park and facilities can't cope – and the bad experience means that they then stay away. The cafe and restaurant never seem able to cope with the extreme fluctuations in demand.





Autumn scene on the millpond.



The Silverburn south of Silverdale



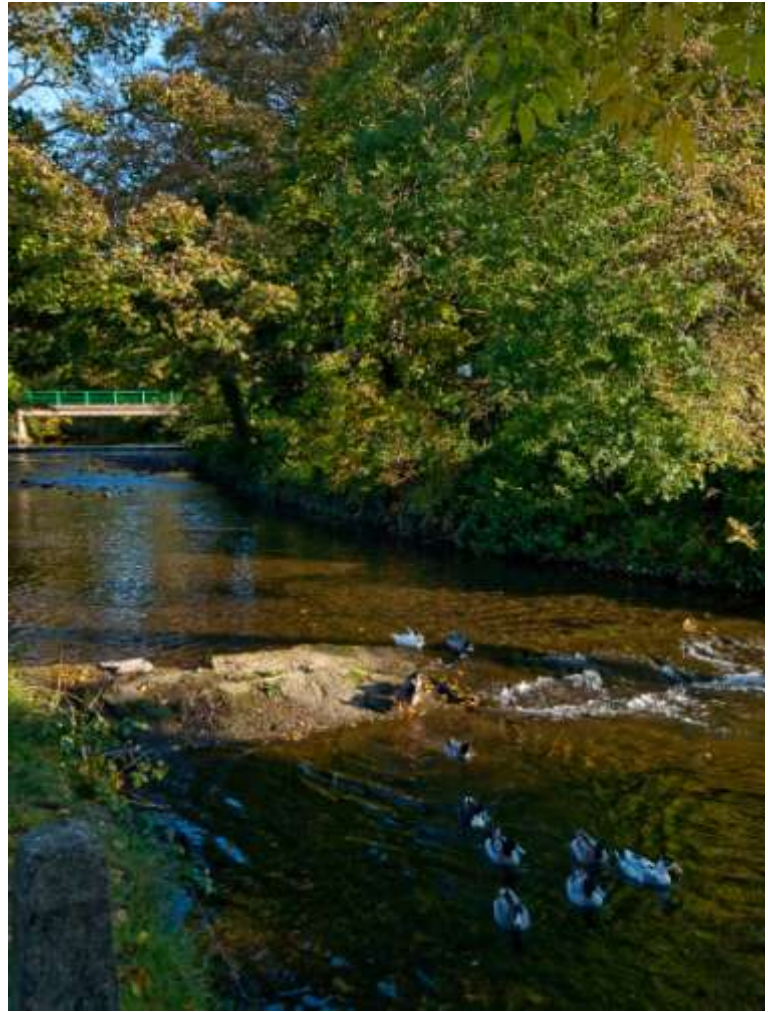
Right: washing ladder



Below: Leat from the tributary stream near Monks' bridge.



The Silverburn immediately below the ford.



The ford, with the former mill beyond.



The ford and footbridge



House on Rushen Abbey slip road.



Abbey hotel, currently being refurbished.

An isolated example of the early 19thC neo-classical style.



Isolated detached brick-built house facing the ford.



The former mill beside the ford.



Abbey Church, first service 1897;
consecrated 1907
Architect: E wan Christian
Builder: John Cooper, Castletown
Tower a copy of the old tower on
Rushen Abbey



Abbey Church House built by the Honourable William Cain of Ballasalla and Melbourne, 1909. This is a community building, used as an infant school. Mill Road.



Mill Cottage and Mill House, on Mill Road.



Converted chapel, Mill Road

Limestone rubble walls, erratically coursed, rendered to street; steep roof pitch; inset tablet high on gable; 'gothick' head to windows.



New Haven, on the corner of Mill Road and Crossack Road

Limestone construction, dormer windows, inappropriate windows.



Cottages beside the roundabout on Bridge Road

Squat proportions; rendered; mix of windows of varying quality; squint on street corner; crooked gable.



Church hall from Mill Road

Limestone construction, random coursing; 'gothick' brick arch head to one door; varying styles to windows and doors; concreted yard; low stone boundary wall.



Walton House on the south side of Bridge Street

Attractive limestone dwelling. Note height of stack, door surround and mullioned windows.



Anne's cottage, on the north side of Bridge Street.

Traditional colours – terracotta walls and pale blue woodwork. The shallowly-bowed windows probably date from 1960-70. The render has been ruled to suggest coursing – an early 20thC feature. The church tower can be seen behind.



Converted chapel on Bridge Road, boarded up and converted to use as a garage, store or workshop, with a substantial forecourt.

Steep slated roof with decorative clay ridge tiles; lancet windows would have offered an untypically high proportion of glazed area; note three openings on gable; rendered apex of gable and gable verge with running profile and decorative corbel; stone boundary walls.



Riverside Cottage

The overall scale is in character, but the roof pitch is conspicuously modern (too shallow); sectional single garage; cream textured render.



Riverside Cottage and Bridge Street from the bridge

House abuts street; gable-on street elevation to nearest element of house, an untypical feature on the Isle of Man; later, larger two-on-two sashes; shallower roof; cream textured render.



Woodland beside the road bridge and War Memorial, facing Poacher's Pocket.

An attractive small area of planted beech woodland.

War memorial beside the road bridge, Bridge Road.



An attractive location. The screen walling is rather out of character.



Craigmore

Architect-designed after Voysey – asymmetry; kicked deep eaves with exposed rafters; bands of casement windows; other windows have Edwardian proportions with decorative mini-paned leaded top light; mock Tudor black-and-white work; arched head to recessed porch; flat-topped shallow bow window.

Craigmore from Rushen Abbey car park

The Voysey-esque Arts and Crafts style houses are on a ridge overlooking the Abbey.





More mock black-and-white work.



The Whitestone

This former farm features in old deeds relating to the Norris/Taubman families, including John Norris, feltmaker.



The Whitestone and the main roundabout in Ballasalla

This attractive mixed terrace of five former cottages/houses linked to further smaller cottages to the south forms an attractive focus point for the entrance to the old village from the Douglas road. The varying roof heights, window heights and window forms make an attractive whole held together by the bold colour treatment.



The main roundabout

A focal point which those passing through identify as 'Ballasalla'. The obstruction-free roundabout handles traffic adequately except perhaps at the busiest times; the Whitestone provides a visual stop, but the other street boundaries could be stronger, and it would be nice to see the utilitarian railings replaced with something more traditional in style.



Shops facing the roundabout on the north side of Douglas Road

The shallow roof pitch of the four properties adjoining the junction, the enlarged shop windows, and the large windows above 'Beautiful Blooms' are outside the vernacular norms. The two narrow cottages with banded windows add colour and the cottage with attractive little dormers at the extreme right brings this terrace back to the smaller vernacular scale.



Terrace beside the Whitestone

An attractive trio of limestone cottages under a continuous roof, one three-bay with shallow porch-screen, two two-bay, with a side door to the rear. Beyond, three cottages, rendered white. This group form an important continuation of the Whitestone terrace, with gradual diminution in scale. Modern doors and uPVC windows could beneficially be returned to more traditional forms.



Commissioners' Offices and Doctors' Surgery

Modern building matching scale and colour of the adjacent buildings.

The discordant features are the modern railings and use of uPVC with large panes of glass, together with the opening out of the streetscape to provide the car parking.



Ballasalla streetscape: houses facing the Commissioners' offices

Discordant 'seventies infill housing; Stone walls and glimpses of gardens beyond.















