

ST MARK'S VILLAGE CONSERVATION AREA

Character Appraisal

*To be read in conjunction with the
The St Mark's Village Conservation Area Order
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CONTENTS

Introduction.	page
Historical Background to the St Mark's Conservation Area	2
Assessment of Special Interest.	
The Architectural and Historic Quality, Character, coherence of the buildings and the contribution they make to the special interest of the area.	4
Other Structures which contribute to the Special Interest of the Area.	5
The Character and Hierarchy of Spaces and Vistas.	5
Prevalent and Traditional Building Materials.	6
The Contribution of Green Spaces and Trees.	7
Negative Factors and Problems to be Addressed.	
Overhead Cables.	8
Re- Use of Redundant Buildings.	8
New Development.	9
Alteration to Buildings.	9
Parking.	9
Conservation Area Boundaries.	10
References.	11

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Historical Background to the Conservation Area.

1.0 St Mark's is probably the last opportunity to preserve and enhance a largely unspoilt Manx hamlet with what is generally considered to be a most unusual grouping of properties on the Island.

1.1 The hamlet of St Mark's is situated in the parish of Malew. Nothing of the history of St Mark's is recorded before the consecration of the Church in 1772.

1.2 In 1827 the Reverend John Thomas Clark was appointed Chaplain of St Mark's. It was Clark who was responsible for building several of the properties we see in the village today. He erected The Old Parsonage in 1830, The School and School House in 1843, and the original pair of Church Cottages in 1846.

1.3 There are currently three Registered Buildings in St Mark's:

- the Old School and Schoolhouse (RB181);
- St Mark's Church (RB182); and
- Church Cottages (RB 184).

1.4 St Mark's is situated in an area where traditionally agriculture was the main employer of local labour. Today whilst there are two farms within the boundaries of the suggested conservation area, Cronk Rhennie and The Glebe Farm which is now an equestrian centre, the significance of agriculture as an employer has declined drastically. The hamlet is now to some degree a dormitory settlement with few of its residents employed in the immediate area.

1.5 The morphology of St Mark's has changed little since the first large scale mapping of the Island in 1869. The road layout on that map (Fig 1) is identical to that of today. Over a period in excess of 130 years that separates the maps, the open spaces that characterise the hamlet remain unchanged.

2.0 ASSESSMENT OF SPECIAL INTEREST

2.1 It is recognised that the concept of an historic area depends on much more than the quality of individual buildings. If this were not to be the case then conservation areas would be synonymous with groups of registered buildings, and there would be no need for conservation area designation.

2.2 The buildings within St Mark's contribute to the value of its character as a grouping rather than as individuals, as together they form a part of the linear footprint of the hamlet that has remained virtually unchanged for almost as long as records exist.

The Architectural and Historic quality, character and coherence of the buildings and the contribution which they make to the special interest of the area.

2.3 A few relatively minor changes appear to have taken place to the built environment over the past 130 years. The Methodist Chapel which was known to be in existence in 1861 has been extended twice (1892 & 1895). Ballacheseid (formerly The Hollies) was built in the final quarter of the 19th century. Ballagarey Green and Victoria Cottage have been extended and some small buildings between the former and the smithy have been removed.

2.4 Two new dwellings appear on today's Ordnance Survey map, the third of the Church Cottages added in 1899, and Cair Vie built in 1985. A further dwelling Fo Cronk has recently been completed, it is situated between Victoria Cottage and the cemetery.

2.5 No records exist to tell us what, if anything, existed in St Mark's prior to 1772 when the Church was built. However, it would appear from research that most, if not all, of the buildings in existence today with the exception of the Church, Cair Vie and Fo

Cronk were built in the 19th century. Three buildings have a commercial past. The disused and derelict smithy, Victoria Cottage which was formerly the Post Office, and the White House was once a Public House.

Other Structures which Contribute to the to the Special Interest of the Area.

- 2.6 The earlier map shows two wells present. The one adjacent to the smithy is still in existence, although long disused. It is however a local feature worthy of preservation, as are the K6 Jubilee phone kiosk to the 1936 design of Sir Giles Gilbert Scott and the post box adjacent.

The Character and Hierarchy of Spaces and Vistas.

- 2.7 The unchanged open nature of St Mark's is considered to be one of its special attributes that make it worthy of conservation area status. It has many spaces that could be considered 'ripe for infilling'. Whilst designation would not exclude development of any of these spaces it could control the amount of future development (if any), and ensure any such development enhances rather than detracts from the character of the area. The spaces between buildings are a most important feature. They offer glimpses of the rural landscape that would be lost if they were ever enclosed.
- 2.8 St Mark's is an elevated hamlet standing 120 metres above sea level. It enjoys views down to the southern coastline and towards the hills to the North and West.
- 2.9 When approaching it, the hamlet can be seen from several miles away with the landmark of the Church belfry being particularly dominant. There is a sense of anticipation as the Moorish style architecture of the church, and chimneys to the

school and Church Cottages become clearly visible. The experience in some ways might be likened to the approach to a Spanish hilltop village.

Prevalent and Traditional Building Materials.

- 2.10 The buildings of St Mark's are of a modest cottage scale and are vernacular in appearance. Residential properties have the typical solid, well-balanced Manx characteristics with a centralised front entrance door and windows to either side and above. They have substantial chimneys on the gable walls and clipped eaves. This is well illustrated in Barrule Cottage.
- 2.11 An interesting feature is that there is no formal building line throughout the hamlet, and buildings are variously fronting or gable on to the road.
- 2.12 St Mark's is on the edge of the area where granite was used in construction. Several of the buildings are wholly or partly built with this material. Those not built in granite are built with random rubble-filled stone walls with a rendered exterior. This gives a harmonious balance of colour and texture, which is at one with the surrounding rural landscape.
- 2.13 It is likely that when first built the majority, if not all the buildings, would have been roofed in Manx Slate. Manx slates are of random size, are much thicker than Welsh slates and can almost be regarded as stone tiles. These slates tended to fail due to the method of fixing which was usually an oak peg or chicken bone. When the fixing failed they were held in position with mortar.
- 2.14 In St Mark's the only remaining Manx slates are on the disused Smithy and a barn at The Glebe Farm. Today the majority of the buildings have Welsh slate roof cladding although there is some use of man made artificial 'slate'.

2.15 Window styles vary throughout St Mark's. The Smithy displays cast iron diamond pattern windows, which date circa 1830, however, in such cases, it is probable that the windows have been re-used from another building, as was often the case in rural buildings of this type. The Schoolroom and School House have timber sliding sashes, as do several of the residential properties. Unfortunately some properties have replaced their original windows with uPVC.

2.16 A feature of the Isle of Man is the use of sod hedges. These are stone and earth banks and are used as field enclosures along the roads through the hamlet, together with substantial stone walls, some of which are formed in granite.

The Contribution of Green Spaces and Trees.

2.17 Throughout St Mark's there are green areas beside the roads in the form of verges. These widen out in several places, the largest area being at the apex of the central triangle containing the ecclesiastical properties and which is known as the Village Green. These are formal green areas, as opposed to the informal ones in the form of agricultural land, which surrounds the heart of the settlement. There are several mature trees in the churchyard and a number of less mature specimens and hedgerows throughout the hamlet. The green areas and variety of trees contribute to the overall sense of openness and provide a canvas against which the unique and quite striking group of buildings which make up St Mark's, can be seen.

3.0 **NEGATIVE FACTORS AND PROBLEMS TO BE ADDRESSED**

Overhead Cables.

- 3.1 Like many rural areas on the Isle Of Man, St Mark's has a number of overhead cables which detract visually from the character of the area. In recent years some of these have been re-sited underground. It is considered desirable that those remaining above ground are also placed underground. The cables are owned by The Manx Electricity Authority and Manx Telecom. In the vast majority of cases they are suspended above ground level on cost grounds: their undergrounding would be a positive enhancement to the area.

Re-Use of Redundant Buildings.

- 3.2 At the present time there are two redundant buildings in the Conservation Area. The Smithy has been disused for many years and is now derelict. It would require a major scheme of works amounting to virtual reconstruction to bring it back into beneficial use. In a small hamlet the size of St Mark's it is unlikely that a commercial enterprise could succeed without the need to attract visiting customers. This would present additional parking problems and detract from the character it is proposed to conserve. It therefore appears that the most suitable beneficial use (if at all) for the Smithy might be residential. The merits of any proposed conversion scheme would need careful consideration.
- 3.3 The Old School and School House are currently vacant. The house having been empty for several years is now in private ownership. The Old School ceased to be used for educational purposes in the mid 1950's and has since been infrequently used

for Church and social purposes. At present owned by the Church, a community use is likely to help retain the special sense of local identity which still exists in the village.

New Development.

- 3.4 Whilst new development might not be ruled out, detailed and careful assessment of any proposed development in the village would be required relative to the potential impact on the special character and historic interest of the settlement and its existing balance. The refurbishment of existing redundant buildings is considered preferable to new buildings wherever possible, where a case for additional accommodation may be justified and appropriate. A good example of this is the conversion of former agricultural buildings adjacent to The Old Parsonage.

Alteration to Buildings.

- 3.5 Several of the buildings in St Mark's have suffered from well meaning but unfortunate improvements in recent years. It is appreciated that, other than by educating property owners, little can be done to reverse the damage already done. By designation of conservation area status, future improvements would be subject to stricter control and some currently qualifying as permitted development would require Planning Permission.

Parking.

- 3.6 There is no off-road public car parking in St Mark's. Residential properties appear to have sufficient off-road parking to accommodate their needs. There may, however, may be a need to accommodate a small number of cars of those attending Church or Chapel and this should be kept in mind in any future plans for the village.

4.0 CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARIES

- 4.1 The boundaries of the conservation area are outlined in red on the mapping which accompanies this document. Their position has been decided following consultation with interested parties including local residents and the Malew Commissioners.
- 4.2 The boundaries include all of the built structures within St Mark's. It is considered necessary to include both farms (The Glebe Farm and Cronk Rhennie) as the buildings which form these rural groups, are considered important in the overall character of the area.
- 4.3 It is considered necessary to include land around all road access points to the hamlet. Inappropriate development on one of these key entrance sites could jeopardise the views into and out of the village and the vistas referred to earlier in this report which are gained on approaching the village in the rural landscape.
- 4.4 Wherever possible, field and property boundaries have been utilised as this is quite the most logical approach and is also helpful for identification purposes.

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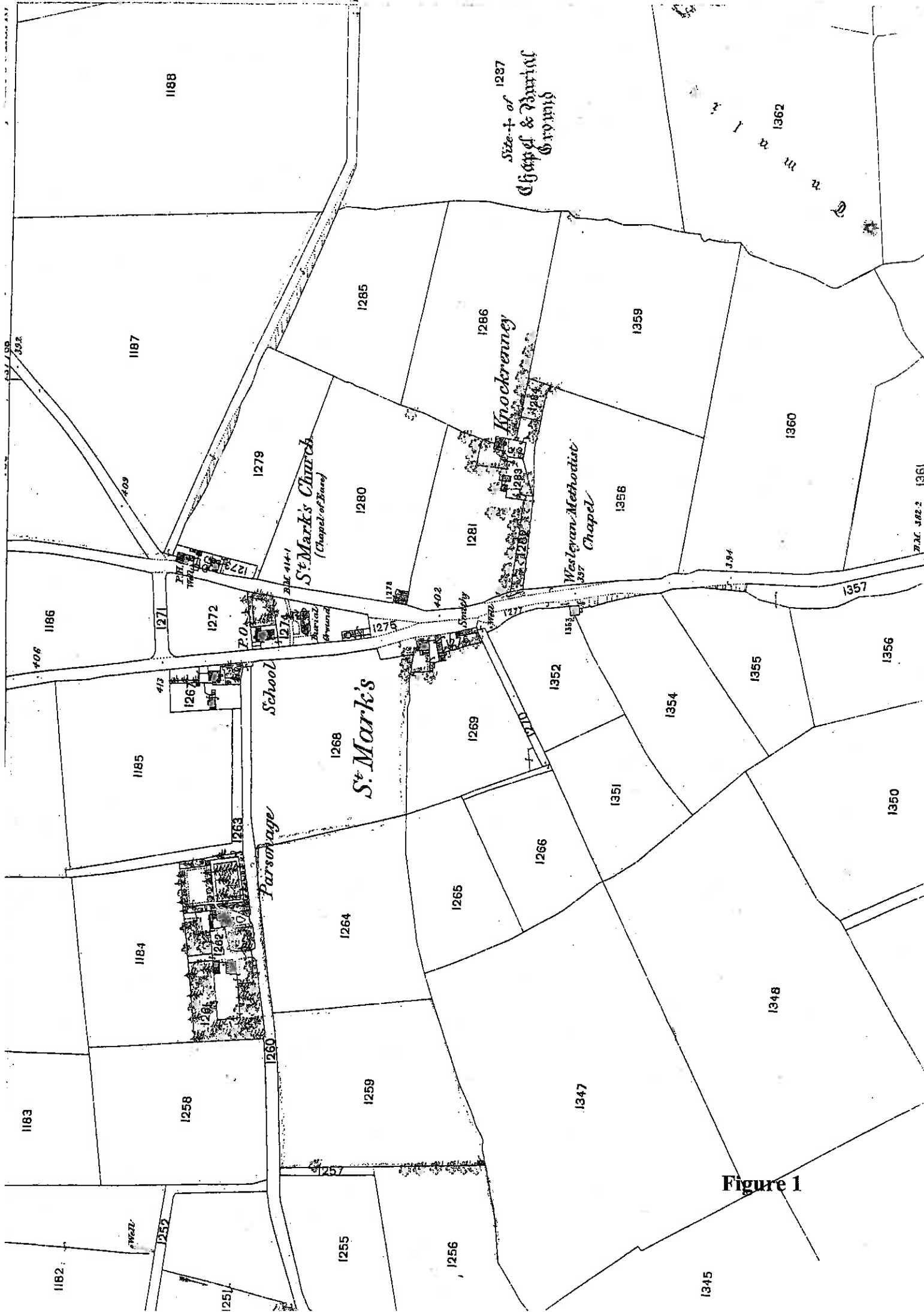


Figure 1