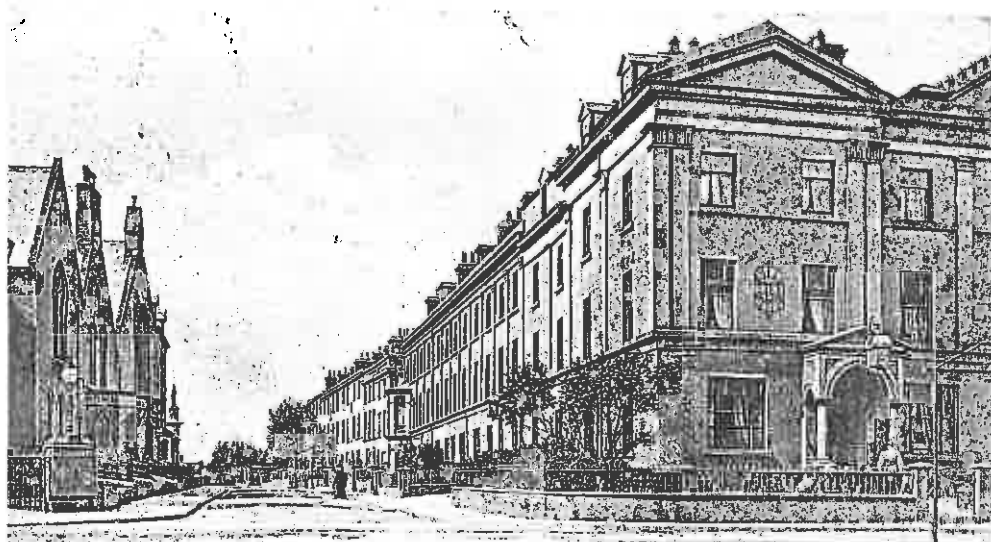


UPPER DOUGLAS

WOODBOURNE ROAD CONSERVATION AREA

Character Appraisal

*To be read in conjunction with the
Woodbourne Road Conservation Area Order
1st September 2003*



Department of Local Government and the Environment
Rheynn Reiltys Ynnydagh as y Chymmyltaght

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In order to justify the selection of an area for Conservation Area status, it is necessary to undertake an appraisal of such an area's character and appearance. The intention of this procedure is to clearly set out the justification for Conservation Area designation, with the added aim of summarising a practical, distinct and factual assessment of the area in a working document. The character appraisal has been the subject of consultation with The Advisory Council on Planning and the Environment, The Douglas Corporation and many other interested parties. The Town and Country Planning Acts place a duty upon the Department of Local Government and the Environment to determine which parts of the Island are areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance, and to designate such areas as Conservation Areas.
- 1.2 The unique and cohesive character which Douglas possesses as a fine seaside town has long been recognized, not only by the Island's local community, but possibly to an even greater extent, by visitors to our shores, who readily compare the variety and quality of the Capital's architecture, to some of the finest townscapes throughout the British Isles.
- 1.3 The Island has always tended to 'wait and see' before adopting patterns of living and approaches to legislation and commerce. The same may be said of the historical development of architectural fashions in the Island. We find architectural styles or 'periods' identified by reigns of various English Monarchs, taken up at a leisurely pace and still remaining in use for years after such styles were abandoned for new approaches, outside of

the Island. This tendency can be a little confusing when trying to date a property, but it has also been instrumental in achieving the unique blend of buildings remaining today.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Douglas occupies a choice location on a wide, east-facing bay, marked by headlands to the north and south, and backed by steeply sloping broughs to the west.

2.2 The town had confirmed its position as the principal trading harbour of the Isle of Man during the eighteenth century. The majority of buildings were sited in a triangle around the harbour which, during the late 1700s and early 1800s, was the fashionable area. However, during the nineteenth century, a number of developments were to occur which encouraged the rapid growth of the town and Douglas was to prove attractive to residents from other parts of the Island, as well as “second home” owners and tourists alike.

2.3 Along with the development of major sections of the town’s infrastructure, the relocation from Castletown to Douglas in 1869, of the House of Keys, was probably one of the most important influences on the subsequent growth of the settlement.

2.4 In response, people increasingly chose Douglas as their main place of dwelling and the town gradually spread along the shore front and uphill onto the broughs behind. Initially, access was very difficult, but major works afforded access to areas behind the promenades and the opening of the former Ballabrooie, Ballakermeen and Ballaquayle estates for development saw further increases in the number of residences constructed during the Victorian period.

3.0 ORIGINS, TOWNSCAPE AND CHARACTER

- 3.1 Upper Douglas is characterised by a number of small areas and distinctive neighbourhoods, which possess fine examples of terraced properties. It is a common feature that within such areas, a wide variety of house designs can be found and the influence of Georgian, Regency, Victorian, Edwardian, and Arts and Crafts Periods are all recognisable and this unique mix gives vibrance and vitality to the built fabric of the Island's Capital.
- 3.2 The townscape of upper Douglas is distinguished by a number of fine, and often very elegant, civic spaces in the form of squares and gardens, which provide a focus for surrounding terraced properties. Additionally, the avenues and other approach roads to these spaces are lined with carefully designed terraces, whose architectural language, detailing and rhythms provide a foretaste of the overall approach adopted in the enclosing architecture of the squares themselves. These early examples of town planning, although rigorous in their approach to detail, form and layout, succeed in creating a sense of spaciousness, charm and gentility which is now synonymous with the identity of substantial, predominantly residential, areas of Upper Douglas.
- 3.3 From the mid nineteenth century onwards, impressive Victorian terraces gradually developed north of the main town centre and away from the busy, and heavily populated, harbour area. Many were arranged to both create and enhance frontal views, being laid out around green spaces and gardens. The approach to 'period' architectural styles adopted in the Island does not always take on a text book format in terms of design detail or expected dating: this again adds a Manx flavour to the resulting architecture such as is not found elsewhere.

- 3.4 Woodbourne Road was originally formed to facilitate improved access from the heart of Douglas to Onchan and the more remote north. The eminent Harrison family had owned the ‘Woodbourne’ estate and between 1801 and 1819, the fine residence which now forms part of the Masonic Hall, was built. This building has now been researched for Registration purposes. On the death of Alice Harrison (nee Ridgeway) in 1856, the estate was divided up and sold as parcels of land for building.
- 3.5 This main arterial route into the town is flanked by buildings which show the rich variety of styles adopted by our Victorian forbearers: there is a predominance of Italianate detailing and design seen both in the form of detached villas, as well as terraces with their highly-modelled, repetitive elevations. Decorative stucco, ornate ironwork and contrasting red and yellow Ruabon brickwork, all make important and pleasing contributions to the streetscape as it is progressively presented.
- 3.6 Woodside Terrace , once known as Mile End Terrace after a nearby milestone located one mile from Douglas, is worth special mention. The balanced and restrained order of the terrace reflects the late Georgian style of the early nineteenth century. Long, sunny back gardens give a hint of the quality of these original high status properties, which are thought to be of a similar age to Victoria Terrace, Douglas, already a Registered terrace.
- 3.7 In 1894, plans were approved by the Douglas Town Commissioners for a layout of roads around a square, now known as Hilary Park. John Christian Cain was a builder and owner of the land who engaged Frank Laidman Heslop, a young architect from Dunoon, who had settled

in Douglas. The yellow and red imported brick adopted for the properties built on Park Road and those facing across the park onto Woodbourne Road, make use of ‘crow stepped’ gables and narrow sliding sash windows, reminiscent of the architect’s Scottish homeland.

- 3.8 The area focusing on Woodbourne Square and Queen’s Gardens offers a fine example of tightly-knit, Victorian development within the town which, although relatively high in density, because of grouping of houses around central gardens, provided spacious accommodation in properties whose principal elevations enjoyed vistas across leafy parkland. In such cases, dwellings fronting directly onto the central gardens would undoubtedly have been the most sought after, each enjoying its own view and degree of sunlight, depending on position.
- 3.9 However, the terraced properties that border and provide approaches to the ‘green spaces’ provide important architectural links. Principally designed as dwellings, in recent years a small number of professional business uses have become established.
- 3.10 The vast majority of properties within the Conservation Area benefit from small, private gardens for the full width of their frontage: this serves to give a sense of separation and privacy from busy public thoroughfares.
- 3.11 The architectural design, form and decorative features of the properties in the vicinity of Woodbourne Square and Queen’s Gardens are aesthetically enhanced by their close relationship with the maintained open spaces. Together, they form an architecturally appealing and historically interesting space and the close network of streets, squares and prominent

buildings create a compact area of expressive period fabric to be valued and which is well worthy of protection.

3.12 Another prominent developer in this area from 1830 onwards, was John Stephen, who resided in Stephen House. This house retains much of its original character and is located to the west of Woodbourne Road. It sits in the relative peacefulness of a walled garden: a pleasing surprise to visitors to the neighbourhood, Stephen House was one of the early, high status homes in this area and built in the vernacular style.

3.13 Tucked away behind Stephen House we find Wesley Terrace, laid out in 1849, together with Hatfield Grove (1880s). At first glance these properties may not appear to be of particular note, however, together they constitute one of the few surviving examples on the Island, of housing which is almost 'back to back' in plan. At one time Douglas had numerous 'courts' where housing was tightly packed facing onto alleys and cul-de-sacs, however all have been demolished, save for one or two examples. This small, quiet, area retains a certain sense of place to be protected and valued.

3.14 As was the normal pattern, many properties in the Conservation Area back onto service lanes where may often be found historic details, as in the central runs of granite setts, which serve as channels for storm water.

3.15 An important element of the concept of Victorian life in Upper Douglas is embodied in the parade of shops found at Prospect Terrace. This group was designed by the notable local architect John Robinson and as adapted for retail use, would have served the needs of the area

as it was gradually expanded and developed. The architectural tactic of disguising a group or terrace in the adopted form of a classical 'palazzo' gives this striking composition added grandeur, in spite of some of the more recent adaptations and unfortunate shop frontages. The formality of the neo-classical style provides a pleasing framework within which a common sense of order is applied to frontages. The properties at each end of the terrace provide the end stops with their pedimented gables supported on flat, double height pilasters. Decorative cornices and string courses add horizontal emphasis. Although much change has occurred to shop frontages, some enhancement works have been carried out in recent years showing what can be achieved. The group is the only surviving example of such a neighbourhood shopping development of this period and makes an important contribution to the character and townscape of the area.

- 3.16 John Robinson was also employed, this time by John Stephenson, to design Adelaide Terrace, which included the private house now the Rosemount Hotel. Again the quality of architecture identified with John Robinson acts as a balance for its opposing 'family members' on Prospect Terrace.
- 3.17 Trinity Methodist Church, the largest and most commanding Nonconformist place of worship on the Island, was built between 1884 – 1886. Built of Manx slate stone with local red sandstone used for dressed openings, string courses and decorative features, including the later stone spire, this building occupies a prominent corner site; is aesthetically very pleasing and has landmark qualities. The Church makes a very notable contribution to the locality.

- 3.18 All Saints Church is another landmark building which offering a rare example in the Island of good quality, twentieth century architecture, typically being employed in church buildings elsewhere during the middle of the last century. The Church and adjacent Church Hall occupy prominent sites on the boundary of the Conservation Area.
- 3.19 Part of the areas distinctiveness and quality lies in the density and regularity of the building forms: Hawarden Avenue, Selborne Road, Primrose Avenue and Westminster Drive all exhibit this sense of order, yet combine with small front gardens, set-back of building lines and widths of roadway, to enhance the sense of elegance and openness. This is sometimes difficult to appreciate fully, due to the high levels of motor cars now present on the streets. A number of properties in this locality have been carefully restored and upgraded, retaining original windows and revitalising the appearance of frontages with traditional painting schemes.
- 3.20 Similar comments apply to the terraces of Demesne Road, Raphael Road, Kensington Road and Bucks Road, however here the massing and form is much more overpowering, but again the striking quality of architecture which encloses and frames the roadways is collectively very important. Rhythms of bay windows, gable peaks, window formats emphasise the vertical format but give a coherence to this major group of buildings.
- 3.21 Kensington Road Youth Centre (*formerly the Kensington Road School of Art and Gymnasium*) St Bridget's Hospice (*formerly Finch Hill House the Christian family home*) face one another across Raphael Road, the name adopted by Philip Christian for this section of the Finch Hill Estate which he developed in 1885. The School of Art saw the early training of many of the Island's leading artists and designers, including Archibald Knox. The setting of these buildings

is enhanced by the wide confluence of several roads, enabling us to enjoy the buildings to advantage.

3.22 In progressing through the Conservation Area, the close association of buildings and open spaces, together, make a striking impact on the locality. Design language has a strong vertical emphasis resulting from the predominance of sliding sash windows, chimney stacks and pots perched atop steeply pitched roofs; and with powerful buildings at prominent corner locations. The Gardens and the Squares exist as strong nuclei and together these green spaces and mature trees, are vital to the area's sense of place, character and overall quality. Enclosed on all sides by robust stylish architecture, they make an appealing and visual contribution to the townscape. The established green pockets with their different physical attributes are as much a part of the area as the buildings themselves and the evolution of the two is tightly enmeshed. Any mature tree groups now emerge as important features of the area. Imposing trees, together with established shrubs and seating are enjoyed today by both residents and visitors, but there is an opportunity to further enhance the quality and use of open spaces and communal areas. A positive exploitation could help to emphasise the relationship of the established gardens, with the buildings which surround them.

3.23 It is clear that in the planning of the Gardens and Squares in the Conservation Area, there was an overriding intention that the gardens be in harmony with the architecture that evolved around them. House frontages with their decorative features such as railings, gates, cornices, etched glass and ridge tiles were intended to be seen and appreciated for their individuality and splendour. The open aspect of civic spaces, or alternatively, vistas gained along approaching routes into the town, enabled house frontages in their settings to be seen to full advantage.

Properties benefit from retention of finely detailed of plaster mouldings, sliding sash windows, the variety of bays, stuccoed quoins, string courses and hooded mouldings, all adding to the richness of architectural forms. This abundance of high quality fabric is a major contributory factor to the distinct character of the area. These qualities have survived many generations and still enrich the quality of our built environment, despite the increasing intrusions of modern day living. It is very difficult to draw a definite edge to the Conservation Area, as the buildings continue in typical design and quality of detail into adjacent roads and avenues. The repetition of form along arterial and secondary routes, combined with a variety of detail, serves to draw these adjoining thoroughfares into a cohesive whole which is worthy of recognition and protection. The 'green' elements of this environment and their immediate surrounds provide an obvious centre on which to base an appraisal of this fine array of predominantly nineteenth century architecture.

- 3.24 The area of Eastfield, Mount Bradda, Brighton Terrace and Westmount corresponds to that shown on a plan dated 1851 prepared by George Raby, Architect and Surveyor and titled 'Plan of Building Ground situate at Rosemount'. The area was part of the Joyner estate and the plan shows a layout totalling 53 dwellings. Fourteen were built and form what is now known as Eastfield, but the remainder were not built in their original form. The 1869 Ordnance Survey Map shows the present street pattern with central gardens and with Eastfield House and Rose Lodge occupying corner positions at the east and west side of the 'square'. The terrace known as Eastfield was an early approach to Town Planning in that covenants were incorporated into deeds of sale in an endeavour to control the design of properties and the retention of open space. The evolution of the remaining properties fronting onto the gardens happened

predominantly in the 1880s and resulted in a interesting and lively mix of architecture. The retention of private allotment gardens is a survivor of the original plan.

4.0 NEGATIVE FACTORS

4.1 A number of characteristics have a negative impact on the area. In recent years the presence of vehicular traffic has steadily increased in level. Traffic movement through the area is generally heavy and on-street car parking continues to be a problem for us all. Unfortunately, the presence of so many vehicles on the streets does detract from the special quality of place and sense of ease which is more evident, say on Sunday mornings when traffic is at a lower level.

4.2 There has been some replacement of timber sash windows with white UPVc casements, however there are increasing examples of repair and upgrading, or appropriate replacements which have received grant assistance. The loss of decorative mouldings on some properties and unsympathetic pebble dashing has affected the ability to distinguish the architectural form of some terraces. The choice of uncomplimentary colour schemes also serves to erode the quality of appearance of some individual and groups of buildings. As with anywhere, there are also some properties within the area which currently suffer from a lack of maintenance. There is also evidence of a variation in the degree of understanding in refurbishment. Original iron railings have been lost on individual houses to the detriment of neighbouring properties and with a loss of architectural unity.

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 Negative elements identified are largely judged to be reversible, given time, appropriate guidance and support. As such, they are not considered to be of sufficient weight so as to deflect from the overall special quality and character of the Woodbourne Road conservation Area. Many problems can be rectified and features improved with careful consideration and appreciation of the urban environment. The support of appropriate planning policies and improved levels of grant assistance, now in place, is of great importance to this initiative. Conservation Area designation aims to maintain and improve the unique qualities of a particular area, whilst also allowing it to prosper and consolidate.