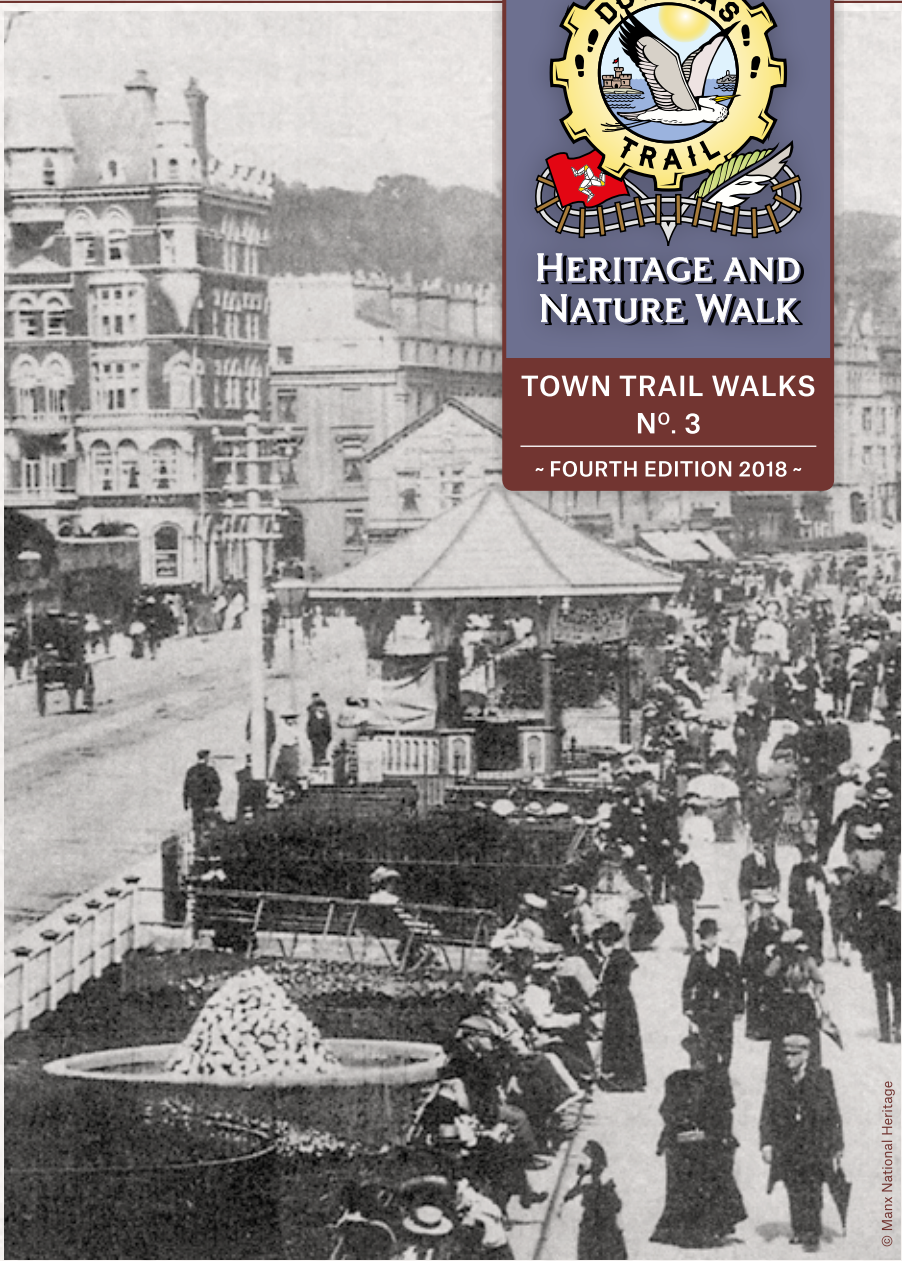




## HERITAGE AND NATURE WALK

TOWN TRAIL WALKS  
Nº. 3

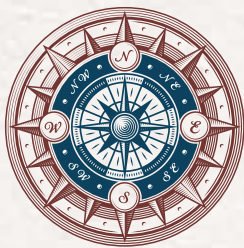
~ FOURTH EDITION 2018 ~



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DOUGLAS PROMENADE  
HERITAGE WALK

 **DOUGLAS**  
Town Centre Management



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*References/Further Reading*

Kniveton et al. "Douglas Centenary 1896-1996" (1996) *The Manx Experience*  
 Slack, S. "Streets of Douglas - Old and New" (1996) *The Manx Experience*

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**2018 YEAR OF OUR ISLAND**  
*a special place to live & work*

The walk is about a mile and a half long and will take 1/2 - 1 hour depending on stops taken. There are many pubs, hotels, restaurants and cafes on the route. Buses run frequently to return you to your starting point. Alternatively, in the summer, return by horse tram or carry on to the North of the Island on the Victorian Manx Electric Railway.

## INTRODUCTION

Early habitation of Douglas took place around the inner harbour. The construction of the Promenade, in the 19th Century illustrated the changing importance given to the seaside as a place to reside or take a holiday. The restricted physical location and the need to accommodate sea-facing residences, and later to house large numbers of short-term visitors, has produced a characteristic building form of tall sweeping terraces.



### 1. JUBILEE CLOCK

The clock located at the bottom of Victoria Street was presented to the town and the people of Douglas by G.W. Dumbell to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887. Dumbell was a wealthy bank owner but when his bank collapsed three years later it caused financial ruin for over 8,000 businesses and individuals on the Island.

The clock was moved to its current location in 2013. Its earlier position is just a few metres away and is marked by studs in the road.



### 2. LOCH PROMENADE

Loch Promenade was constructed between 1872 and 1882, prior to which there was no continuous sea wall. (Part of the old sea wall can still be seen at the corner of the lane half way down Howard Street, off Loch Promenade). It included the Villiers Hotel, now replaced by Royal Bank House on the corner of Victoria Street. The design of the original buildings had to follow a standard pattern and were subject to approval by Mr. Elliston the surveyor appointed by the Town Commissioners and which resulted in its classic unified Victorian appearance.

Extensions to Loch Promenade in the early 1930s added a further 100ft of width to the original 80ft and six sunken gardens, 'The Marine Gardens', were incorporated, designed by John Denman of the British International Horticultural Association. These included seating, shelters, a 200ft boating pool and an illuminated fountain.



### 3. TOWER OF REFUGE

St. Mary's Isle or Conister Rock has, over the centuries, been the scene of countless shipwrecks and lost lives. At high tide the rocks were hidden just below the waves waiting for unsuspecting or drifting boats, and at any state of the tide in storm they represented a daunting prospect. During the 19th Century, having witnessed many ships driven onto the rocks and battered mercilessly by the sea, Sir William Hillary, the founder of the RNLi and resident of Douglas, proposed the

building of an extension to Douglas Harbour and a sanctuary on St Mary's Isle for crew and passengers who had been tossed into the sea. Following the wreck of the ship the St George on St Mary's Isle in November 1830, a public subscription was launched and John Welch was commissioned to design and build the structure. Sir William laid the first stone on St George's Day 1832. The owner of the rock, Mr. Quane, then passed over the title deeds to be held by whoever was the president of the Manx branch of the Lifeboat Institution. A visit to the island by the poet Sir William Wordsworth inspired him to write about the 'Tower of Refuge' and the sanctuary has been known by that name ever since.



#### 4. SEFTON HOTEL

The Sefton Hotel on Harris Promenade was built on a site previously occupied by part of the Villa Marina Gardens. Designed by architect W. J. Renisson, the centre section was completed in 1892 and the wings completed three years later. Major extensions completed in 1999 have seen the creation of a large atrium area at the rear of the original Victorian façade. [www.seftonhotel.co.im](http://www.seftonhotel.co.im)



#### 5. THE GAIIETY THEATRE

The Gaiety Theatre, which opened in 1900, was designed by Frank Matcham, 'The Prince of Theatre Architects'. Formerly the site of the Marina Pavilion, it is one of the few late Victorian theatres to have survived intact with all its original decorations, fittings, furnishings and stage mechanisms.

In 1976, after the fabric of the theatre had begun to deteriorate, the Isle of Man Government set about a programme of refurbishment to make it safe and in 1990 The Friends of the Gaiety, a charitable group, launched a massive restoration programme which has put the theatre back as near as possible to Matcham's original design and concept. Tours of the theatre are held on Saturdays at 10:00a.m. from April to September, telephone 694500 or ask at the box office. [www.villagaiety.com](http://www.villagaiety.com)



#### 6. DOUGLAS WAR MEMORIAL

The 50ft high war memorial was constructed using funds raised by public subscription and unveiled by the Earl of Derby on 25th May 1924. Earlier that day the Earl had been made the first Freeman of the Borough of Douglas.

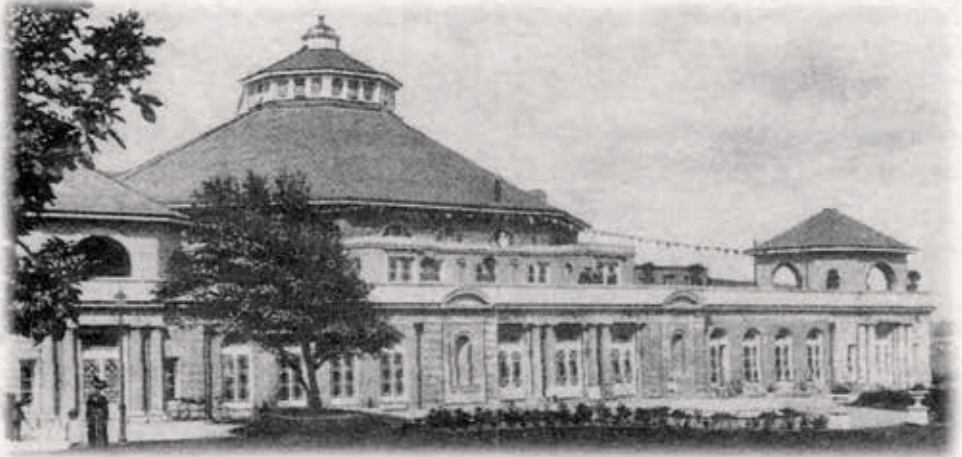


#### 7. THE VILLA MARINA

The original Villa Marina Kursaal (subsequently replaced by the title 'Royal Hall' following the visit of King George V and Queen Mary in 1923) was built as a multi-use entertainment complex in 1913 on land purchased by the then Douglas Corporation on favourable terms for the purpose from the trustees of the estate of Henry Bloom Noble, the town's great benefactor. It was designed in a classical style by Robinson and Jones of Leeds and the adjoining colonnade and shopping arcade were added in the 1930s, designed by F. Prentice Mawson of Lancaster.

An extensive reconstruction and refurbishment programme of the whole Villa Marina complex commenced in 2002 and the beautiful newly renovated main building and Gardens reopened in 2004. The complex is home to the Royal Hall, an auditorium that references the grandeur of the Edwardian era, as well as a suite of conference and meeting rooms, a cinema and a children's play area.

In 2009 the refurbished Villa Marina Arcade was opened, providing a link between the Gaiety Theatre and the Villa Marina. The arcade features a renovated 1929 Wurlitzer organ. [www.villagaiety.com](http://www.villagaiety.com)



## 8. CLARENCE TERRACE AND THE ESPLANADE

These fashionable terraces were designed in the later Regency Style in the 1840s by local architect John Robinson and built on part of the Castle Mona lawns. They were occupied by permanent residents and the well-to-do staying for the summer; far enough away from the jumble of old narrow streets of the old town to allow a rear mews for carriages.



## 9. CRESCENT CINEMA

The Crescent 'Super' Cinema opened in 1930 at the height of the cinema boom, and with 2,000 seats, it was the largest cinema theatre in Douglas. Its ornate interior was designed in Tudor castle style with imitation tapestry walls and a stage shaped like a portcullis. Plans to build an identical theatre on the left of the site never proceeded. The site formerly housed a Pierrot village, tearooms and a wooden 'picturedrome'. Later it was used as a gym and a nightclub. It has now been redeveloped as apartments with the original frontage retained as it is registered (equivalent to 'listed' in the UK) and extended to create a matching façade which may be fulfilling the desires of the original developer of the site!



## 10. CASTLE MONA

The Castle Mona was the first building on the Promenade, built in 1805 as the residence of the fourth Duke of Atholl, the Governor General of the Isle of Man.

The architect was George Steuart and it was built mainly from free-stone from the Isle of Arran, which was shipped into the Bay and jettisoned at high tide to be recovered when the tide went out. Its conversion into a hotel 30 years later anticipated the future of the area to accommodate visitors. It is currently unoccupied.



## 11. THE BEST WESTERN PALACE HOTEL AND CASINO

Britain's first public casino was licensed in Douglas in 1963 and opened in the Castle Mona Hotel. It later moved to the purpose built Palace Hotel and Casino (now the Best Western Palace) and replaced the former Palace Coliseum variety theatre. It was opened by the then 007, Sean Connery.

A second licence was given to the former Palace Ballroom immediately to the rear of the hotel which was once one of the largest ballrooms in Europe. It was largely demolished in 1994 and only the Opera House remains, which houses a two screen cinema.

[www.bestwestern.co.uk/hotels/best-western-palace-hotel-casino-83942](http://www.bestwestern.co.uk/hotels/best-western-palace-hotel-casino-83942)



## 12. THE FALCON CLIFF

As you pass the Best Western Palace Hotel and Casino, look up to your left.

The white castellated building standing above the Promenade is the Falcon Cliff, one of the town's most prominent landmarks. It was originally built as a residence for bank manager John Jackson in the 1840s by local architect John Robinson and later became a hotel and entertainment complex. Because of its elevated position, a cliff lift, or incline railway, was constructed in 1887; it fell into disuse and was re-erected at Port Soderick in 1897. A second lift of a counterweight design driven by an electric motor was constructed in 1927 and was operating until the 1980s. The remains of the cliff lift can still be seen. Latterly the Falcon Cliff was given a new lease of life being renovated and utilised as offices.



### 13. KAYE MEMORIAL GARDENS

This peaceful garden was created in 1955 in memory of Alderman Joseph Kaye and Sarah Kaye, Mayor and Mayoress of Douglas 1904-05 by way of a bequest made by their son.

A statue by local sculptor Bryan Kneale of the famous Manx author Sir Hall Caine (1853 - 1931) is situated here as well as a memorial stone erected by Douglas Borough Council and dedicated on 2nd August 2013, the 40th anniversary of the Summerland fire disaster, in memory of the 50 people who lost their lives in the tragedy of 1973.



### 14. STRATHALLAN CRESCENT

Development of this Terrace commenced when the fourth Duke of Atholl purchased the land as an extension to his Castle Mona estate in the 1820s.

The Atholl family had succeeded to the Lordship of Man in 1736 following the death of the childless tenth Earl of Derby when James, Second Duke of Atholl, inherited the title. It was during the 55-year reign of the flamboyant fourth Duke, John, which commenced in 1774, that the town started to develop towards a holiday resort. The attractive two-storey pre-Victorian Terraces have generous front gardens and some retain the original timber detailing to their balconies. The villa at the centre of the Terrace, the Min y Don, was once the home of Captain Rowe of the Laxey mines. It was built on the site of a snuff mill and although it bears a date plate of 1795 it was actually built in about 1830.

The Duke left the Island in 1825, but his daughter Lady Amelia Sophia and her husband James Drummond, Lord Strathallan, remained residing at the Castle Mona.

With the agreement of her father, who was still technically Governor of the Island, Lady Amelia had the name of the crescent changed from East Mona to Strathallan, which was the final endeavour to perpetuate the Atholl influence. The Strathallans left the Island in 1830 and the Duke breathed his last three months later.





## 15. DOUGLAS BAY HORSE TRAMWAY

The first passenger horse tram services began on 7th August 1876 as a result of a vision by civil engineer Thomas Lightfoot who felt that it would be of great service to the thousands of visitors arriving by steamer. By 1889 the line had been enlarged to serve the whole 1.5 miles of sea front. The running of the trams to the new Victoria Pier was the final touch to the new Loch Promenade, which had been officially opened in 1875 by Governor Loch. Of the 51 tramcars used since 1876, 21 are still maintained for regular services. The Douglas Bay Horse Tram service is unique in the northern hemisphere as the only other example is in Victor Harbour in South Australia. Free guided tours of the stables are available on selected dates throughout the season. For more information visit the website below or the MER Ticket Office at Derby Castle. [www.friendsofdbh.org/](http://www.friendsofdbh.org/)



## 16. MANX ELECTRIC RAILWAY

The public transport system was extended at the end of the 19th century with the construction of the Manx Electric Railway system in 1893 and, still using the original rolling stock, provides scenic journeys from this northern end of the Promenade along the coast through Laxey (where a connection can be made to the Snaefell Mountain Railway) to Ramsey. At eighteen miles long it is one of Britain's longest vintage narrow gauge lines. The Manx Electric Railway museum, located at Derby Castle yard, is free admission and open every Sunday throughout tram season between 12:00 and 16:30. [www.manxelectricrailway.co.uk](http://www.manxelectricrailway.co.uk)



## 17. SITE OF SUMMERLAND/DERBY CASTLE

Summerland was a leisure complex built in 1971 on the site of the former Derby Castle entertainment complex. Unfortunately, tragedy struck when a fire broke out just two years later resulting in the loss of 50 lives. The complex reopened in 1978, but it eventually closed down and was demolished in 2005 with the sport and leisure functions being transferred to a new facility, the National Sports Centre, and the entertainment facilities to the Villa Marina.

