Introduction

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Living with the sea conjures a host of images. Children play by the sea, swim in the sea, sail on the sea and dream of 'going to sea'. Lives depend on the sea as a source of food, of trade and commerce and as a means of travel. Fishermen, net makers and boat builders make their living from the sea. Flocks of gulls float on the sea unwittingly guiding the fishermen to where they should shoot their nets. We admire the beauty of the sea, and respect its power. The moods and state of the sea, the sky and the on-shore and off-shore weather more generally, are constant sources of conversation among those who live by the sea and by those whose lives depend upon it.

Living with the sea is part of the everyday experience of the people of the Isle of Man. The Isle of Man is a small island located in the Irish Sea at the very centre of the British Isles and is not to be confused with the Isle of Wight, located in the English Channel, off the coast of the county of Hampshire. The authors of the old Irish sagas referred to the Isle of Man by many names, the last of which was *Ellan Sheeant*, the Sacred Isle. Until the early nineteenth century the majority of the population were speakers of Manx Gaelic, a Goidelic Celtic language, derived from Old Irish. Constitutionally, the island is a crown dependency that has never been part of the United Kingdom or Great Britain. It has no representation in Westminster. Instead it boasts its own directly elected legislature that stretches back unbroken at least 1,040 years to a time when the Norse Vikings ruled. It lays claim to have been the first country in the world to give some women a vote in parliamentary elections as early as 1881. It has its own education, health and legal and fiscal systems; its own national flag, postage stamps and currency.

The island's strategic location in the middle of the Irish Sea, at the centre of the British Isles, has rendered it a crossroads of cultures. The island's heritage is steeped in a culture that is at once Pagan, Christian, Celtic, Norse, British and maritime. The sea has inspired many aspects of Manx culture – poetry and literature, folk lore, dance, art, music, religious hymns and popular songs. People sing with joy of being 'beside the sea (side)', they lament 'the wreck of the herring fleet' and, through the evening hymn, they pray for 'the harvest of the sea'. The island's most famous poet, T.E. Brown, wrote of childhoods 'care-pricked yet healed the while with the balm of rock and sea'. In Manx folk lore the herring was chosen by the other species of fish as their king. The Celtic god Manannan Mac y Lir is the son of the sea and the island's protector. Thought by some to have been a celebrated merchant who lived in the Isle of Man, Manannan was reputed to be the most famous pilot in Western Europe who could forecast the weather by studying the heavens. He was also a necromancer with the ability to envelop himself and his island in mist, making them invisible to strangers and invaders. Still that

protective cloak of mist descends, often for days on end. And still, some believe in him in the way that others believe in the power of the religious Lord God to protect 'those in peril on the sea.'

Port St Mary

Our book focusses on the seaside village of Port St. Mary, in the south west of our island, and its development over the 150-year period 1829–1979. Port St. Mary is located in the Parish of Rushen (strictly, the Parish of Kirk Christ) and within the larger sheading[1] of the same name, Rushen. For many years it was referred to as 'The Port' with settlements around the harbour and on the hilly slopes nearby. In 1891 it became a village and included the rapidly developing area to the North of the harbour, around Chapel Bay. It takes its name from Keeill Moirrey or (St) Mary's Church, long since disappeared, but possibly located on the site on which the current Town Hall is situated, overlooking Chapel Bay. Over the years its name has been recorded variously – Portell Morrey, Purt le Murrey, Purt le Mourray, Purt le Maurai, Port Le Morey, Purt Noo Moirrey and Port-le-Mary. The Victorian music-hall song, 'I'm the Pride of Purt le Murra', offers yet another spelling. Today's visitors are welcomed to the Port by the signboard *Failt erriu dys Purt le Moirrey.*

The sea was a main source of subsistence and cash for many Port St. Mary families and generated employment in a range of seafaring activities. Herring fishing was the mainstay of the local economy, with the first herring houses established in 1770. 'Crofter-fishermen' went to sea to catch herring and mackerel during the 'seasons', while others engaged in trades related directly with the sea – boat builders, rope-makers, carpenters, joiners, timber merchants, net-makers and nailors. Many others supported those who lived by the sea – shoemakers, publicans and inn keepers, blacksmiths, stonemasons, grocery dealers, butchers, bakers, tailors, saddlers, schoolteachers, preachers, undertakers and sumners[2]. Through much of the nineteenth and twentieth century gangs of herring girls arrived in the Port from Scotland every year to gut, salt and pack herrings. It is said that a team of three experienced girls could gut and pack up to 1,000 herring every hour.

Before the development of roads and the railway, the sea was the main means of transportation around the island, between the island and the other British Isles and around the globe far and wide. In times of economic depression Port St. Mary families emigrated to Australia, New Zealand and North America by sea. The sea has separated and reunited the people of Port St. Mary in ways that the land has not.

The sea sustains life but it also takes life away. Many Port St Mary people have been taken by the sea in the course of earning a livelihood, fighting wars and assisting and saving others. Generations of Port St. Mary families can name the ships wrecked on rocks, near and far. They recall with pride the role the Port has played in the construction of the lighthouses on the Calf of Man and Chicken Rock and the lives saved by their lifeboat and its volunteer crew. Many recall the story of the 'Brig Lily' disaster of 1852, probably the worst ever loss of life on the island's rocky coast. *En route* from Liverpool to South West Africa, the 160-ton brig was wrecked in a storm on the islet of Kitterland

between the Isle of Man and the Calf of Man. Five crew drowned but the men of Port St. Mary managed to save eight. The following day, a thirty-man salvage team, comprising Port St. Mary fishermen, carpenters, and shipwrights, assembled, led by Enos Lace – a Port St. Mary grocer, ship broker and sub-agent for Lloyds insurers. The men boarded the brig at 6am and smelled smoke. At 7.55am the whole of the south of the Isle of Man was rocked by a catastrophic explosion of forty tons of gunpowder. Twenty-nine men died, leaving behind twenty-two widows and seventy-two children.

> *The hearts of widows and orphans are torn in bitter anguish! Port St. Mary is in tears! Ye Christians of Mona, for the love of Christ, help these distressed ones!"* (Mona's Herald, 29/12/1852)

The sea and the land meet on the shore and the beach. But the meeting point of the sea and the land is not fixed. The 'space between'[1] the land and sea is made, washed away and remade by the semi-daily tides, sometimes gentle and calm, sometimes raging and tempestous. Over long periods of time the relentless, incoming tides have eroded the coastline. Historically, the beaches exposed by the tides provided seaweed used by farmers to fertilise the land. The carboniferous limestone beds exposed at the edge of the sea at Kallow Point were quarried. Some of the stone was used for building and some was burned in nearby kilns to create lime for farming. ~~The quarried stone was used for building and the lime for farming the land~~. The sea for its part reclaims nutrients and minerals from the land it erodes. In places, the fluid 'space between' the land and the sea has become more fixed, or at least contained, by the erection of sea walls at the Promenade, Shore Road (the underway) and the Point.

But people have not always looked after the sea on which they depend. For centuries people all over the world have used the sea as a dump for waste that goes on to harm to marine life. They have also developed technology that has depleted fish stocks and destroyed the sea bed. Port St. Mary people have played their part in the process but they, like many elsewhere, are now working to protect and conserve the sea bed in closed and managed areas and to keep the beaches clean of the plastic waste that kills sea life.

Through the centuries the sea brought invaders, immigrants, migrant workers, traders and 'stranger visitors' alike. But as well as a means of travel, the sea, the beaches and the coast became a source of leisure. By the late nineteenth century the Isle of Man was attracting large numbers of holiday makers from the industrial North of England, Scotland and Ireland. Port St. Mary participated in this growing tourism industry in a major way, facilitated in part by the arrival of the railway in 1874. Her large beach was safe for swimming and sand castle making, and her coast offered walks as beautiful as they were bracing. Boarding houses and hotels were built 'along the Promenade' around Chapel Bay, to the North of the harbour. The main season lasted only 12 weeks but there were some visitors in May and September. Although the season was short, the economic benefits were significant – for housekeepers, job seekers, shopkeepers, pleasure boat owners, farmers, grocers, butchers and bakers, pub owners – and for the church and chapels whose congregations swelled. Tourism became a mainstay of the Port's economy

and brought significant numbers of women into the labour market. It transformed the Port from a 'fishing village to a holiday haunt' (IOM Examiner, 17/09/1937). In the 1960s the Karran-Quirk footpath was built as a winter works scheme. Known popularly as 'The Cat Walk' this new seaside attraction enabled tourists and residents alike to walk *above* the sea, if not *on* it! Tourism remained very important right up until the late 1970s, interrupted only by the two world wars.

During the two world wars many Port St. Mary people left the island by sea and served far and wide. Some did not return and families were left bereft. WWII would also bring many to the Port by sea ad train. These were German and Austrian women and children classed by the United Kingdom government as 'enemy aliens' and housed in the Rushen internment camps in Port St. Mary and neighbouring Port Erin. Only a very small minority were Nazi sympathisers, the majority offering no security risk at all to the British war effort. Ironically, they arrived in Port St. Mary on the 29th May 1940, the very same day that three of the Isle of Man's Steam Packet vessels, the Mona's Queen, Fenella and King Orry, were sunk during Operation Dynamo,the evacuation of allied troops from Dunkirk in which eight Manx vessels participated. The arrival of 'aliens' in a village that was itself coping with the losses of war created some disquiet. Women on both sides of the barbed wire suffered enormous emotional hardships through the war years. Despite, or perhaps because of this, friendships were formed between villagers and 'aliens', many of which have endured to this day.[4]

Port St. Mary 1829–1979

How then has life changed over the 150 years of our history? In their Trade Directory of 1843 Pigot and Slater provide us with a fine introduction to the start of our story. We quote from it *verbatim*, starting with a general description of the parish in which Port St. Mary is situated.

> Rushen (or Christ Rushen) parish, in the sheading of its name, lies at the south-western extremity of the island; it is about five miles and a half in length from north to south, by an average breadth of one and a half from east to west. The church, situate four miles west of Castletown, near the centre of the parish is a plain unadorned edifice, rebuilt in 1775, and adapted to contain a congregation of four hundred and fifty persons; the living is a vicarage, in the gift of the crown. The parish school is adjacent to the church; and about a quarter of a mile to the south is a school for girls, supported by a small endowment. The central part of the district is fertile productive land, and is as well cultivated, perhaps, as any locality in England; but the north and south portions are bleak barren highlands. This parish contains plenty of limestone of the best quality, and lead ore is found at several places: *Kentraugh*, the beautiful mansion of Edward M. Gawne, Esq., about three miles

from Castletown, is unequalled in the island…A noble colonnade extends along the entire front of the edifice, upwards of ninety feet, supported by eight massive columns of the Ionic order. The lofty rooms of the interior, especially the saloon (which is eighteen feet in height, and of proportionate dimensions, with a beautiful Gothic arched ceiling), display the elegant taste of the hospitable proprietor. The gardens and pleasure grounds are delightfully laid out; and the offices and out-houses, conveniently grouped, contain all the various requisites furnished by the best judgment, and appropriate to an establishment of the magnitude to which they belong.

Port Erin (so called from the bay opening towards Ireland) is a small village and sea-port in the above parish, nearly five miles west of Castletown and 15 south-west of Douglas. The village comprises about forty dwellings, a small Wesleyan chapel, and a comfortable inn; the employment of the inhabitants is fishing and husbandry. The bay, which forms a natural square, has good anchorage; and vessels of two hundred tons burthen can come close to the rock, on the south side, in favourable weather. Breda *(sic)* Head, a bold and abrupt precipice, forms the north boundary of the bay. Port Erin is the most convenient place for taking a boat for the purpose of visiting the Calf of Man which is distant about three miles south-west.

Port St. Mary (or Port-le-Mary) is a busy prosperous village and sea-port, in the same parish as Port Erin, situated on the western side of a fine spacious bay, on the south shore of the island, four miles west of Castletown, fifteen south of Peel, and the same distance south-west of Douglas. The village consists of about eighty houses, principally erected close to the harbour, which is protected from the violence of the sea by a substantially built stone pier, two hundred and thirty yards long and eight yards broad, with a lighthouse on its northern extremity. There is a new pier about to be built on the south side of the harbour, which will furnish extra facility for loading and unloading vessels. More than eighty light vessels, from fifteen to forty tons burden belong to this little place; many of them are employed in the fishery during the season. The Carrick Reef, near the middle of the bay, is dangerous, being covered at high water. A little south of the village, on the shore, below high-water mark, is a stratified quarry of limestone, of superior quality, from which the new jetty at Douglas, and many other piers and quays, have been constructed. At Mount Gawne, about one mile on the road to Castletown, is the extensive brewery of Mr. Michael Connal.

The Calf of Man is a small Island separated from Man by a dangerous channel of five hundred yards width; its area comprehends

> about 570 acres, of which nearly one hundred are cultivated; and it contains one farmhouse, three cottages and two lighthouses. The occupier of the farmhouse, Mr. Shepherd has opened it as an inn, erected a corn mill, and provided a threshing machine. The surface of the Calf is uneven-in some places elevated from four to five hundred feet above the sea; and great part of the coast is composed of high rocky shire. Rabbits have multiplied here to a somewhat valuable amount, not less than from two thousand four hundred to two thousand eight hundred being annually exported.

In the main, our book covers the period 1829–1979. How life has changed for the people of Port St. Mary! The physical description of Port St. Mary and its environs above would be recognisable still in 1979, but many aspects of social, political and economic life would not. In 1829, land ownership was concentrated in the hands of one man, John Murray, the fourth Duke of Atholl. By 1979, land ownership was distributed widely. Compared with 1829, the population in 1979 was larger[5], its residents lived longer and many more were immigrants from elsewhere on the island, the British Isles and further afield. By 1979, all were literate in English and all young people attended school up to at least the age of 15 years. Where, in 1829, no ordinary citizen had a say in who represented them in the Manx parliament, by 1867 11 Port St. Mary men were 'qualified' to vote, followed by five women in 1881. By 1979, all adults could vote. In 1829, most made their living directly from the sea and the land; by 1979, few did. In 1829 everyone attended church and/or the chapel; by 1979, congregations were small. In 1829, the majority of residents spoke Manx; by 1979, only a handful did.

What happened in between is in part a result of broader political, economic and social changes on the island and 'across the water' in England more generally. Through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Manx government came to provide, through personal and other taxation, free education, health services and 'old age' pensions. In 1891 the Port St Mary Village Commissioners were established as a local government authority and from then on they facilitated the gradual introduction of sewers, water, gas and electricity, new housing and the extension of village boundaries. What happened in between was also a result of changes in the conditions of life in Port St. Mary and, critically, of the contribution to change by the people of Port St. Mary. The stories of some of those – from conservative and reforming politicians to political activists to those who kept alive the Manx language and culture – have been published already.[6] Our book introduces many more stories of the people who have made Port St. Mary what it is today.

Our book addresses maritime life, farming, building, roads and landmarks, education, tourism, places of worship, streets and place names, shops, pubs and internment during WWII:

In Chapter One, Mick Kneale talks about the Port's important maritime industry, recalling a time when the bustling harbour was home to fishermen, boat builders, 'gutter girls' and vessels of all shapes and sizes, including nickeys, cutters and schooners.

In Chapter Two, Nigel Crowe investigates the origins of the network of route-ways serving Port St Mary. He also identifies some of the oldest building in the district.

In Chapter Three, Catherine Clucas looks at how the upland and lowland farms around the Port developed their own individual character and kept pace with the inevitable changes within farming.

In Chapter Four, Andrew Foxon discusses the story of places of worship and sites of religious significance in and around Port St Mary. Not only are there ancient places of burial and the early keeill which gives the Port its name, but there also stories of the established church, the role of Methodism, the Beach Mission, and the turmoil of internment.

In Chapter Five, Angela W. Little charts the development of two tracks of schooling for the children of Port St Mary. She reminds us of long forgotten schools, such as the Port St Mary National School and the 'Tin Tab' school, and asks 'what *was* the 'Rushen School Crisis' all about?

In Chapter Six, Hugh Davidson shows how Port St Mary differentiated its tourism offer from Douglas, 'making no apology for its lack of bright lights, blaring music or tinselled pageantry', instead skilfully positioning itself through a combination of the old world charms of a fishing village and the freshness of a modern seaside resort – a centre for exploring the scenic and heritage attractions of the 'Beautiful South'.

In Chapter Seven, Doreen Moule records the inception of the WWII Women's Internment Camp in 1940 and its evolution into the Married Camp in 1941. The questions on the lips of the local people were: 'Enemy Aliens? Who are these people? Why are they here and where have they come from?'

In Chapter Eight, Staffan Overgaard and John W. Qualtrough walk us through the streets and roads of Port St Mary, tracing the origins of their names. Some names are very old, some are in English and Manx, some followed the fashion of their day – and some have no names at all.

In Chapter Nine, Staffan Overgaard and John W. Qualtrough take us on a tour of eighty locations which housed shops, occupied by 250 shopkeepers in the last 120 years. The true number of shopkeepers are most likely much higher – the residents of Port St Mary were very industrious.

In Chapter Ten, Pamela Crowe shares her memories of Millennium Year 1979 – a colourful celebration which marks the end of the period of our history of Port St Mary.