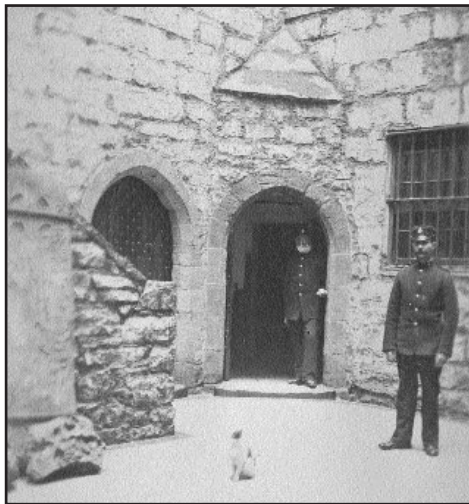


DEBATE 2 - FREEDOM OF THE PRESS ON TRIAL



James Brown in Castle Rushen



Castle Rushen courtyard and gaolers

- The trial of James Brown, owner-editor of the 'Isle of Man Times' newspaper; in 1864 was a turning point for the Reform Movement
- The House of Keys put Brown on trial for contempt and breach of privilege because of his campaign for an elected House of Keys
- James Brown was imprisoned for his beliefs
- The case went to Appeal and the Court of Queen's Bench in London reversed the decision of the House of Keys
- The case reinforced the fears of the House of Keys about the continued independence of the Isle of Man from the United Kingdom, but they became more prepared to make changes if they felt they could negotiate their right to legislate for the Island to include some fiscal rights otherwise controlled from the U.K., even if that meant conceding some measure of popular election of the Keys.

James Brown was the son of a freed slave who came from Liverpool, where he had worked as a printing compositor, to the Isle of Man in 1846. At that stage the Island still had no taxes or postage to pay on newspapers and that may have been part of the reason for his interest in the Island. Within two years the printing boom ended, but Brown stayed, working on the 'Isle of Man General Advertising Circular', which became 'Brown's Advertising Circular' in 1855, and set up the 'Isle of Man Times' in Douglas in 1861. His newspapers were in the radical tradition, advocated popular elections, and became increasingly vocal during the 1850s and early 1860s, much to the annoyance of the House of Keys.

The crisis came in 1864 when the House of Keys rejected a Bill from the recently established Douglas Town Commissioners which would enable them to make bye-laws to govern the town. An M.H.K. commented that all the Commissioners should be granted was 'control over the donkeys on the shore'. Brown's report suggested that this comment had received approval from 'the donkeys in the Keys' and called them despotic rulers. For this he was summoned to the Bar of the House for contempt, and was illegally committed to Castle Rushen for six months 'to purge his contempt'. He was released on Appeal after six weeks, sued the twenty members of the Keys who had signed the warrant for his imprisonment, and was awarded £519 damages and costs.



- Debate between the Speaker and M.H.K.s about Douglas Town Commissioners and James Brown's support for them

- Images of James Brown writing his report
- Vote on the motion that 'James Brown will be summoned before the Keys for contempt of this House and breach of its privileges'.
- Voting results
- Images of Brown at the Bar, and being led away by a policeman
- The Lieutenant Governor, Henry Loch, reports on the outcome of Brown's Appeal



Video Loop



Key Points



Background Info



Look out for