

01 The Introduction

Welcome. I am Manannan, and I am your guide to Peel Castle and St Patrick's Isle. You may follow any route you want, looking out for numbers attached directly to buildings or to low posts on open ground. At the site of each number you should position yourself facing it. This will be your key to my wisdom on this ancient site. Key the number you see into your machine to trigger my commentary, which lasts about a minute at each point. Stay at the numbered point while listening to my commentary or you may not see what I am describing. You do not have to visit every numbered point, and you do not have to visit them in any specific order. You can stop my commentary whenever you want to, and move on to the next site.

I shall be with you throughout your tour of St Patrick's Isle, another part of the Story of Mann.

02 The Gatehouse

The Gatehouse was built in the late 14th century, and forms part of the earliest standing defences along with the short length of curtain wall to either side built in red sandstone. It is very strongly built with a vault above the ground floor, so that there was no timber floor which could be set fire to. The ground floor room served as the guardroom, while at first and second floor levels there were living quarters, complete with grand fireplaces. At the very top there still remains the battlemented fighting top. The castle entrance was protected by a barbican just in front of the gatehouse, from the top of which troops attacking the castle could be assailed with missiles.

03 The Moddey Dhoo (pronounced Mor-tha doo)

One of the most famous stories associated with Peel Castle is that of the Moddey Dhoo or Black Dog. The story relates how an enormous, mysterious black hound took to waiting in the vicinity of the gatehouse at night. The superstitious garrison soldiers would not pass by alone when going to make their report to their commanding officer late at night, until one night, when one of their number bragged that he would do so. Fearing the worst, his companions let him go off on his own. A few minutes later they heard a bloodcurdling scream, and rushed out of the guardroom to find him wide-eyed and frightened out of his wits. He was quite unable to speak, and died a few days later, having never uttered another word.

There is a simple, prosaic explanation to the story, but local people prefer to leave the mystery of the Black Dog to the imagination of their listeners: perhaps the Moddey Dhoo wanders still when darkness falls over the castle.

04 Red Curtain

The Red Curtain, together with the gatehouse, was built by William leScrope in the late 14th century. At this time, there was no causeway between St Patrick's Isle and the main island. The river went out to sea where Fenella Beach now lies, and St Patrick's Isle was connected to the island by a sandspit running from the gatehouse entrance towards the main beach. This is the lowest part of the islet, and the obvious direction from which to launch an attack. For this reason it was also the first to be fortified using the most modern techniques of the 14th century. Later, in the 15th century, the wall was refashioned, and later adapted so that cannon could be mounted facing the main island. From the outside, it is possible to see various straight lines in the masonry of this wall where it has been adapted over the centuries.

05 Fenella Beach Tower

This tower marks the extent of the 14th century defences in this direction. The curtain wall to your right was extended round the island in the late 15th - early 16th century, but this tower marks the end of the earlier defences felt necessary to defend St Patrick's Isle from any land attack coming from the direction of the main beach, which now lies beyond the harbour mouth. The beach which lies below you was created by the construction, in the mid 18th century, of the causeway which now connects St Patrick's to the main island. Across the beach lies Peel Hill, which provides the natural shelter for Peel's harbour, at the mouth of the River Neb. The construction of the causeway diverted the course of the river, which scoured away the sand spit connecting St Patrick's Isle to the main island at low tide.

06 The Loopholed Wall

A Loopholed Wall is a structure which provides cover for men armed with muskets to shoot from. Any attackers who succeeded in breaking through the gatehouse into Peel Castle would find themselves faced with two walls of this kind, making the steep ground immediately inside the castle entrance a “killing ground”. These walls were built in the middle of the 17th century when musketeers in fortified positions were murderously effective against lightly armoured soldiers attacking over open ground. The loopholed walls were the work of James Stanley, 7th Earl of Derby, who improved fortifications all over the Isle of Man in an attempt to hold it for the Royalist cause during the English Civil War. The two gate pillars on the ground between the loopholed walls and the gatehouse are the only remains of the old cemetery wall which was removed to provide a clear field of fire.

07 The Half-Moon Battery

The 16th century Half-Moon Battery is one of the earliest structures in the castle specially built for mounting cannon. Prior to the raising of the red curtain wall, it provided an uninterrupted view past the gatehouse towards the beach and the town of Peel, from which direction any attackers would have had to approach. Its construction protected earlier features below from any further disturbance. Beneath the turf in its interior, excavation revealed that the medieval cemetery extended at least as far as this point. Lower down, archaeologists also uncovered the earliest evidence for the use of the islet: over 2000 pieces of worked flint, dating to a time approximately 8000 years ago, were found in a pit. They appeared to have been deliberately placed here, which may suggest a more permanent occupation of St Patrick's Isle than might normally be expected of the nomadic hunters who lived at this time. Remains which may tell us yet more about the early use of the island still await discovery.

08 The Armoury

This building was the storeroom for weapons, ammunition and gunpowder for the entire castle. It was built in the late 16th century, when the Isle of Man would have been strategically important in Spanish plans to upset England's communications with Ireland. At this time, Catholic Spain was aiming to overthrow the Protestant English Crown and planned to occupy Ireland before attacking England itself. The Earls of Derby responded to this threat to England by further enhancing Peel's fortifications so that the castle could better defend itself against attack from the sea. The increased number of cannon, and later the provision of firearms for the ordinary soldiers, meant that the secure and safe storage of gunpowder and ammunition was an absolute necessity from this time onward.

09 The Garderobe

Effective hygiene was very important in a fortified place like Peel Castle. In the event of a siege, disease could be spread because of poor toilet facilities. This toilet, or garderobe to give it its proper name, could be used by three soldiers at once! But toilets were a vulnerable part of any fortification as they required an outlet through the wall: history has many examples of castles being captured by attackers breaking into their sewers. A walk along the footpath around the foot of the castle walls will reveal many small outlets for drains. Imagine how the stones around the openings might be levered off by determined attackers at the dead of night, who could then wriggle up the drains to attack the sleepy garrison. As a result, one of the heaviest responsibilities for an ordinary soldier was night-time sentry duty.

10 General View of Killing Ground / Oldest Part of Castle

From this point you can see all the elements of the oldest part of Peel Castle. Through them can be traced the developing response to changing tactics and new weapons by the castle's builders and defenders.

First and foremost, the gatehouse, and the red sandstone curtain wall to each side of it, were built at the end of the 14th century to protect this part of the island from attack from the main island, to which it was joined except at high tide; St Patrick's Isle has always been vulnerable at this point because the cliffs are usually low.

The cathedral, to the left, was requisitioned in the 15th century and the battlements and stair turret added so that archers could take advantage of the added height. With the advent of cannon, the Half-Moon Battery, also on your left, was constructed in the 16th century, and the Armoury behind you completed slightly later.

As muskets became easily portable and mass-produced, the loopoled walls immediately in front of you and to the left, between the Half-Moon and the cathedral, were added in the

17th century, lest anyone succeed in forcing their way through the gatehouse. Long before these latter developments, the focus of attention had moved to the threat posed by naval attack, and you will see how this is reflected in the construction of a full curtain wall circuit and the creation of a succession of batteries facing seaward.

11 General View from Half Moon of Town and Harbour

The Half Moon Battery provides a grand view of Peel Town and Harbour. This belies its original purpose, however, which was to direct cannon-fire not just across Peel Bay but also at the town should an attack on the castle have been launched from that quarter.

As a result, you have a clear view of the old town tightly crowding along the harbourside and round along the seafront. The great warehouses, grand merchant's residences, public houses and the simple former dwellings of fishermen jostle for space on the narrow streets of lower Peel, in sharp contrast to the more modern residential areas stretching away up the slopes towards Kirk Michael to the north and inland towards St Johns.

The principal landmarks are the Victorian cathedral of St German, which has taken over that role from the ruined medieval church to your left, the slender sandstone finger of St Peter's church tower, and of course the House of Manannan near the head of the harbour, built to echo the harbourside architecture of the Manx ports.

12 The Church of St Patrick

The church of St Patrick, together with the roundtower to the west and the little chapel nearby to the north, are the earliest standing remains of the ecclesiastical community which once occupied the island. It is believed that a monastery existed here from at least the 8th century, for which we have evidence in the form of burials but no sign of buildings. It is probable that any structures would have been small and lightly constructed in stone, turf and timber, and would not have survived. St Patrick's Church itself is 10th or 11th century in its original form, and evidence for this can be seen in the regularly laid courses of red sandstone near the ground. The church was later rebuilt and extended, as may be seen from the masonry laid in a curious "herringbone" pattern. A late addition is the Sumner's pulpit built onto the outside of the south wall, from which the church summoner called the parishioners to worship. By the mid-nineteenth century the church had fallen into great disrepair: recent photographic research and consolidation work has shown that it had been considerably adapted by this time and repairs later in the nineteenth century have masked some of the evidence for its original form and appearance.

13 The Roundtower

Roundtowers were a common feature in Ireland one thousand years ago, when they were built as refuges against marauding Irish and Viking raiders, intent on stealing the monastery's riches; indeed, one of the surprising finds in the cemetery excavated on the other side of the island was a book mount decorated with typical Irish art motifs, which had been re-used as a piece of jewellery. These warlike bands were not equipped for prolonged sieges and providing the monks could safely stay inside these inaccessible towers, their attackers would leave after a few days. The roundtower remained in use for several centuries after the threat of Viking raids had ceased, and was later used as a look-out and provided with battlements; at the same time it may have been lowered, as proportionally it is shorter than many of the Irish examples. To your right is St Patrick's Chapel. This building has few defining features, and is chiefly notable because it is larger than many of the early medieval chapels known throughout the Isle of Man, and unlike them, could have been used for congregational worship. It may have served as a private chapel while St Patrick's Church operated as the parish church.

14 The Garrison Hall

The Garrison Hall was built at the end of the 16th century, probably at the same time as the Armoury. The garrison troops, who lived in the town of Peel, would occupy the hall whilst they were on duty in the castle. Close by are the various domestic facilities and workshops they required in order to be self-sufficient. The hall appears to have had a ground floor given over to living and working, whilst the upper floor formed the sleeping quarters. Headroom on this level was so low, except in the middle, that the first floor could not have been practical for anything else. The walls of this building have been consolidated and repaired, revealing the original line of the gables, but the window openings appear to have been radically altered from their original form.

15 The Garrison Workshops

From this point you can see a number of the buildings associated with the Garrison Hall and used by the soldiers of the garrison in the 16th and 17th centuries. These buildings may one day provide remarkable evidence for how the soldiers of the garrison went about their everyday life. To your left is one of the flanking towers built at the same time as the curtain wall. Several of these towers were put to a subsidiary use, this one serving as a kitchen. A mid-seventeenth illustration shows it with a tall chimney for precisely this purpose. Another tower behind the Garrison Hall had its own toilet and may have served as the quarters for one of the garrison officers. Immediately in front of you are the square bases of two further ovens, while beyond them and to your right are the remains of various offices and stores. Understanding these buildings is now very difficult, because they have been demolished down almost to their footings: in the absence of written records or historical illustrations archaeologists may one day have to excavate here in order to investigate the history of this part of the castle.

16 The Western Battery

One of the requirements of extending the curtain wall around most of St Patrick's Isle in the late 15th-early 16th century was to provide effective protection against attack from the sea.

Ultimately, a battery of cannons was mounted here on a specially widened platform to accommodate their recoil when fired at hostile ships. This battery covered the approach along the coastline behind Peel Hill, and provided a vital defence for the harbour mouth which until the mid 18th century was through the narrow passage between St Patrick's Isle and the main island.

17 General View from bank overlooking Bowling Green

From this point you can begin to appreciate how important Peel Castle was to the defence of the whole of the Isle of Man. The castle commands views to the north-east right round to the south-west, and on clear days the Mull of Galloway in Scotland to the north, and the Mountains of Mourne in Ireland to the west, are easily visible. Any ship coming down from the north between Ireland and Scotland could easily have been seen, especially from the top of the roundtower behind you, which continued in use as a watchstation for centuries after its monastic use had ceased. The Mountains of Mourne are often to be seen on a clear day, but are at their most mysterious and spectacular during the sunsets for which Peel is rightly famous.

18 The Bowling Green

This sunken area was originally used for target practice, originally by bowmen and later by musketeers. With banks of earth on three sides to absorb stray shots, it was the perfect location for soldiers exercising with their weapons. Later, as cannon became the main form of defence, and the ramparts against the curtain wall were extended to accommodate them, the area was levelled and apparently served as a bowling green in the later 16th and 17th centuries: clearly leisure activities were becoming more popular!

19 Fenella's Tower

This small turret, known as Fenella's Tower, was built at the same time as the slate curtain wall in the late 15th - early 16th century. Unlike most of the other towers constructed at this time, this structure stands to a considerable height, and may have served as a watch-tower. Outside can be seen a 17th century loopholed wall, reached by a short passage which starts from the bank outside the tower next to the bowling green. This loopholed wall was for musketeers defending the curtain wall from attackers, and was another of the defensive additions ordered by the 7th Earl of Derby at the time of the English Civil War. Fenella's Tower derives its name from its inclusion in Sir Walter Scott's novel, "Peveril of the Peak": the heroine, Fenella, helps the hero escape from the castle by way of the tower down to a boat hiding in a cave below. Such deeds are only possible in fiction: there is no secret tunnel into the cave, and no secret landing place inside it!

20 The Green Curtain Wall

The Curtain Wall was built in the late 15th or early 16th century, a confusion which arises because it is attributed to one of two Earls of Derby, both named Thomas, who ruled the Isle of Man consecutively at that time: archaeological evidence now suggests that the earlier date is more likely. The stone for the wall could not have come from a more convenient source: the quarry lies only a few metres outside the line of the wall on the north-west side of the island. The Earls of Derby had been very active fighting the Scots on behalf of the King of England at this time and the improvements to Peel Castle's defences reflect a need to protect their Manx interests against vengeful Scottish raids. The Curtain Wall is a work of great deception, for its apparently enormous blocks of slate are little more than facing slabs. By the time this wall was constructed, artillery power was becoming so great that the real defence was provided by the earth bank behind it, which was far more capable of absorbing the force of cannonfire. In the mid 16th century the curtain wall was raised and the rampart behind it widened.

21 The Warwick Tower

The Warwick Tower is one of the early tower houses, probably built in the last few years of the 14th century, shortly after the Gatehouse and Red Curtain Wall. It is a massive structure, though somewhat diminished because the surrounding ground level has since been built up around it. It sits uncomfortably on the curtain wall circuit, which was constructed almost a century later. The difference in construction is masked on the outer walls of the tower because they were refaced with enormous slate slabs when the curtain wall was built. The original masonry can be seen on the walls of the tower which face the interior of the castle. Like the Gatehouse, the Warwick Tower has large fireplaces so that it could be used for living accommodation, but has only one window so that its defensible qualities were not endangered. The only other apertures in its walls are three doorways, one, now sunken, leading to the ground floor, and two at first floor level which were originally inserted to allow the patrolling sentries to pass through it in the course of walking along the curtain wall. Following the improvement of the rampart in the mid 16th century, one of the doors was

blocked, and steps were built to allow the patrols to go around the tower instead of through it.

22 The Dyall Mound

The central part of the island is something of an enigma and has only ever been investigated archaeologically on one occasion. That excavation, in the 1940s, suggested that some of the banks and mounds were dumps of peat for burning as fuel, but more recently the burrowings of rabbits have thrown up sand and late medieval pottery, rather than peat. Some of the earthworks would therefore appear to be made from material imported into the castle or moved from elsewhere within the castle. The central, square-sided earthwork has been carefully sited so that its sides face the four points of the compass. In 1702 it is recorded as mounting two guns and “2 Dyal posts with plates on both,” which is taken to mean two sundials. It seems a little unlikely that even two small cannon could have been positioned on top of the mound and they may instead have been sited on the surrounding banks. There is some confusion about whether the banks surrounding the Dyall Mound represent additional defences for it or were created by digging sunken pathways to protect soldiers from bombardment from Peel Hill. Both possibilities are equally likely.

23 The Cemetery

Directly below where you are standing lies the site of one of the most spectacular pagan Viking graves to have been found in the British Isles. A woman had been buried with the rich trappings appropriate to her status in life, in preparation for an equally impressive existence in the afterlife which the Vikings believed followed their earthly life. The Pagan Lady, as she has come to be known, can be seen in the House of Manannan, and her possessions are on display at the Manx Museum. They include a cooking-spit, a symbol of her domestic authority, an unique necklace of over 70 glass, amber and jet beads, knives, a comb, shears for cutting cloth, and needles. Six other pagan graves, none of them quite as impressive as hers, were also found nearby, but of equal significance is that they form a tiny part of a much larger Christian cemetery. Despite excavating only a fraction of the cemetery, which spreads in all directions from this point, archaeologists were able to identify nearly 330 separate burials. Careful investigation of these sensitive remains has told us much about the lifestyle of these ancestors of Peel, their diets, their illnesses, their burial customs.

24 General View from the mound behind the battery

Directly in front of you stand the remains of the Napoleonic battery built in the early 19th century, while to your right are the ruins of the Apartments of the Earls of Derby, sheltered from the prevailing wind by the rising ground behind them.

The view from here clearly shows the field of fire commanded by this battery, which was built to defend Peel Bay from attack from the sea. Across the bay the red cliffs mark the site of the quarry from which most of Peel's distinctive building stone was derived. On the cliffs above, the estate of bungalows marks the site of the Royal Naval Reserve battery which replaced the Napoleonic battery and was manned until 1906.

The backdrop of this view is provided by the hills which form the backbone of the Isle of Man. Along their western slopes glacial sands, gravels and clays were dumped more than 12,000 years ago to create the low, rolling landscape characteristic of the coastline north towards Jurby Church, whose white tower can be seen on a clear day, nearly 11 miles away. At the churches of both Jurby and Kirk Michael, less clearly visible just 6 miles up the coast, impressive collections of medieval carved stone crosses are on display.

25 Rampiring next to Curtain Wall

So that cannon could be mounted around the curtain wall to provide protection from attack from the sea in the mid 16th century, the earthen rampart behind the walls was extended to create a platform. This specially widened rampart was able to accommodate the cannon as they recoiled after firing, and gave the gunners room to reload. Small-scale excavations have confirmed that the rampart was widened by building a new retaining wall inside the castle and dumping material between it and the original curtain wall. These improvements were commonplace at this time and the practice of extending the earthworks was called “rampiring”, and the finished structure a “rampire”. The rampire is conspicuous on most of the seaward side of the castle, demonstrating that this was the quarter from which attack was most feared: there is no rampire along the south wall facing Peel Hill, from where a land-based bombardment could in theory have been launched.

26 The Sallyport Tower & Horse Rock Battery

This flanking tower is another of the tower houses built in the late 14th century before the curtain wall existed. It sits awkwardly on the curtain wall circuit, and is only connected by a narrow neck of walling. The uppermost part of the tower appears to have been cut down so that it did not impede the field of fire of the nearby Napoleonic Battery, and the interior was severely damaged in the 17th century to create an access to the battery on the rocks below. This battery can be seen from the top of the flanking tower, now joined to the base of the tower by a passageway with loopholes for musketeers. Before the breakwater was built in the 19th century, this three-gun battery, sited at one of the most exposed locations on the island, provided all-round fire to protect Peel Bay from hostile shipping.

27 The Napoleonic Battery

Almost the last time Peel Castle was put to military use occurred in the early 19th century. We know that a battery of cannon was mounted in the castle in the last years of the 18th century to combat the threat of privateer warships, but its location is unknown. It is suspected that it stood on this site, but was obliterated by the construction of the existing Napoleonic battery between 1813 and 1816. This type of battery is called a barbette, and comprised two cannon partly hidden in the sunken emplacement behind the masonry wall, mounted on carriages which could be swivelled round to cover a wide arc of fire. These carriages were pivoted on spindles set into the muzzles of redundant cannon which are still set vertically into the ground.

28 The Guardhouse

This simple sandstone structure was built in the early 19th century using stone robbed from the service quarters. It served as a guardroom for the gunners who manned the 19th century battery a few metres away overlooking the bay. A few metres further inland behind the guardhouse stands a little, brick-built building behind a protective mound of earth. This was the magazine containing the explosive cartridges for the Napoleonic battery.

29 The Service Quarters

The construction of the Napoleonic battery in the early 19th century resulted in the demolition of a number of nearby buildings both as a source of stone and to clear the site. The building which suffered most severely was this, which was part of the range of buildings stretching southward towards the Cathedral. This was the service building, containing a large open hearth against one gable and three ovens against the other. Although now difficult to visualise, we know from a late 18th century print that an enormous chimney stood on top of the inland gable, while excavation revealed two square ovens and one round oven against the seaward end. When originally built, however, this structure served as an open hall, and was certainly in existence by the late 14th century. The high quality, squared blocks of red sandstone from which it was built were prized by the artillerymen constructing the new Napoleonic battery to the north in the early 1800s.

30 The Hall

This is one of the most sophisticated – and complicated – buildings in the castle. The hall was built in the early 15th century when the Isle of Man was given to the Stanley family, later the Earls of Derby, by Henry IV of England. The Stanleys were powerful northern noblemen who continued the English feud with the Scots on behalf of Henry, and set about improving the defences of their Manx possessions in case of Scottish retaliation. The hall was adapted over the next three centuries to keep pace with changing architectural fashions. Initially it had only three rooms, separated by a passageway linking the two doors which face each other. The larger of the spaces, nearer the sea, was open to the rafters, while the smaller was a pantry with another chamber above it, entered by an external staircase. Gradually, the larger room was partitioned off into smaller spaces, and upstairs chambers were added, which required the central hearth to be moved against one of the side walls, and a new fireplace and flue created. This fireplace now partially blocks one of the windows. The hall, together with the other apartments which surround it, fell into disrepair in the mid 18th century.

31 The Flanking Tower

This was another of the early flanking towers built at the end of the 14th century. It is recorded in early garrison records as the Galway Tower, apparently in error for Galloway in Scotland. The tower was originally built at a time when St Patrick's Isle extended further east and south-east into Peel Bay: a large area sandy material has been eroded away from this coastline, and the tower was gradually undermined.

During excavation clear proof was found that the entire outside wall had fallen away, to be replaced when the curtain wall was built to connect the existing towers. A new outside wall was thus built onto the front of the Galway tower, but the tower itself was demolished down to the level of the rampart walkway. Only one part of the tower remained in use: the old garderobe, or toilet, was reached by a doorway, now filled in, from the gable end of the hall.

32 The Iron Age Settlement

Underneath the medieval buildings lie the remains of a settlement lasting from the late Bronze Age perhaps right through until the use of the island by early Christians. These remains provide the most extensive evidence for the prehistoric occupation of St Patrick's Isle. Elsewhere, archaeologists have only been able to find the artefacts of early people who made use of the island, but here they successfully revealed a group of roundhouses. As with the later structures which survive above ground, these houses were deliberately sited on the most sheltered side of the island. They were made from timber, although almost none survives today. Archaeologists were able to see rings of holes cut into clean sand over one metre below the ground on which you are standing. These were the only signs of the wooden posts which formed walls of at least nine round houses. The houses were not all in existence at the same time, and because only a limited area was excavated, the overall size of the settlement is unknown. The houses would have had thatched roofs, which made them vulnerable to fire. One of the largest buildings was used as a granary, and did indeed burn down, leaving a thick deposit of charred grain.

The archaeologists were able to get several accurate dates from burned remains associated with the round houses showing that the community existed from the 8th century BC onwards.

33 The Keeill and Cemetery

Below the stone flagged floor in this room, archaeologists found a burial ground and chapel (called in Manx a keeill), which had been completely unexpected. The chapel had been demolished almost to ground level prior to the 11th century, but surrounding it were a large number of burials, the earliest of which was possibly 6th century in date. In the middle of the 11th century, after the chapel had fallen out of use, a hoard of silver coins was buried at a point just not far from the doorway where the post is positioned. Over forty silver coins were recovered; they would have been sufficient to buy two cows, or perhaps ten sheep, and probably represented the savings of an ordinary farmer. The hoard was hidden in about 1040, and whoever hid them was never able to return to claim them, perhaps a victim of the uncertain and turbulent times.

34 The Apartments, Bedchamber & Store Rooms

The buildings surrounding you are commonly known as the Apartments of the Earls of Derby. To your left is the main hall, while immediately in front of you is a long narrow building which, in its original, single-storey, form was the sleeping quarters for a group of priests responsible for conducting the services in the cathedral. In the late 17th century, the 9th Earl of Derby inserted a cross-wall two thirds of the way along its length, and the smaller part became a store-room. Much of the front wall of this part of the building was rebuilt in the 19th century, masking the true relationship between the different builds of masonry. The cross-wall, complete with a series of fire-places, enabled the creation of a heated drawing room at ground floor level and a bedroom suite on the first floor.

Down to your right, an additional store-room was later added, and the area in which you stand was walled off and cobbled, creating a private precinct free from the soldiers garrisoning the rest of the castle: the bill for some of these works still survives!

35 The Prison Yard & Longhouse

This area was called the Prison Yard. When the crypt beneath the cathedral was used as a gaol, this area was an exercise yard for the prisoners. The steps in the corner provided access, and the doorway where the number is sited would have been securely shut to prevent escape. Beneath the ground near the doorway, the remains of a rectangular timber hall were found. Although the structure had been badly damaged by the construction of later buildings, archaeologists were still able to tell that this was a very sophisticated structure for its time. The wooden hall was built on stone foundations, and had a raised timber floor. Near one end there had been a hearth, and using scientific techniques, the archaeologists were able to prove that it had last been used in the middle of the 12th century. Near the ground next to the doorway down into the crypt, a line of stones protrudes from the face of the wall: it is thought that these are part of an earlier structure which was built over when the cathedral was begun in the 13th century.

36 The Crypt

This chamber lies below the chancel of the cathedral. It is one of the oldest parts of the 13th century cathedral, and may incorporate an older, 12th century structure, which is suggested by a line of protruding masonry visible on the outside wall in the prison yard. The crypt would have been built to contain the holy relics of St German. In the 15th century the curved roof – known as a barrel vault – was added, apparently to strengthen the building. As the vaulting partly obscures the window openings, it would seem to be a later insert. However, the discovery by archaeologists that the ground on which all the buildings in this area are built is very insecure, shows that it is possible that the gable wall may have previously collapsed and been rebuilt. The crypt was used as a prison for offenders against church discipline from the 17th century onwards. Ecclesiastical courts were able to sentence people guilty of moral crimes, and a stay in the dank and cold confines of the crypt must have been a most effective deterrent!

37 The Cathedral Interior

Stand in the middle of the cathedral facing the three narrow windows in the gable wall. The raised area in front of you is the chancel, overlying the crypt and its vaulted roof. The restored tombstone of Bishop Simon lies under a low arch on the left in the north wall; other arched recesses mark the sites of further tombs. The floor level of the chancel was raised in the 15th century, but was always higher than the crossing where you are standing: we can tell this because the bases of the arches, which support the central tower, are visible at a lower ground level. We must assume that the nave behind you was also always higher, but it has been raised even further by its use as a burial ground in more recent times. To your left stands the north transept. See how the window has been changed from a large opening to a smaller one: alterations like this were probably originally carried out when the castle's fortifications were improved in the 14th century. On your right is the south transept. This part of the cathedral has been strongly affected by military alterations and by the instability of the ground: if you look carefully, you can see where a major crack above and below one of the windows has recently been repaired. You can find out more

information about this complicated structure by looking for more numbers on the outside of the building.

38 The Cathedral Arcade

This row of three arches formed an arcade within the cathedral nave. Originally there were four arches, but the one on the right has been filled in and a smaller window set into it. The arcade originally opened onto a south aisle, which was used by priests during religious services to reach the south transept. When St Patrick's Isle was fortified by the English against Scottish attacks in the 14th century, the south aisle was demolished and the arcade walled up. This walling remained until 1871, when all but the right hand arch was unblocked. As part of the rebuilding, a narrow turret was inserted in the angle of the arcade and the south transept, next to the blocked arch. The construction of this turret also blocked a doorway at the end of the aisle which would have led into the south transept: the doorway next to the turret was inserted so that there was still a way into the south transept. This turret was needed to give access to the new fortifications which were added to the upper levels of the cathedral. Battlements and arrow slits were built on the north and south transepts, and on the central tower, which was raised to improve its defensibility. These alterations followed damage caused by Scottish raids, but they caused

consternation amongst the church authorities, who henceforth never had outright control of St Patrick's Isle, and found their religious activities disturbed and curtailed by military needs.

39 The Exit

I hope that I have helped you enjoy the rich history of St Patrick's Isle. If you have not already visited the House of Manannan, you should go to find out more about St Patrick's Isle and Peel Castle, and to experience the Celtic, Viking and Maritime history of the Isle of Man with me as your guide. Don't forget that a walk through the streets of Peel will bring alive the fascinating history of this ancient port and fishing village, whilst further afield the whole of the Island awaits to unfold before you the Story of Mann. Farewell, fellow traveller.