



# Manx National Heritage and the Manx Crosses at Maughold

The Cross House at Maughold Church houses part of an island-wide internationally significant corpus of carved stone crosses which are under the guardianship of MNH. MNH is committed to improving the care and presentation of the Manx crosses across the Island and supporting island-wide care of Manx crosses including new facilities at Maughold. MNH does not own the crosses in Manx Churches but actively works with the community to fulfil its “Guardianship” role.

## Background

The early medieval crosses and carved stones comprise over two hundred objects of extraordinary diversity and international cultural interest. They range from simple grave-markers to intricately decorated memorials, share cultural affinities with the surrounding British islands and Scandinavia, and were carved during a pivotal period in the Island’s history.

In 1906 P.M.C. Kermode, later to become the first Director of the Manx Museum, made large-scale drawings and casts of some of the Manx crosses. In the same year the Trustees worked with architect Armitage Rigby and Maughold Church to build a cross house on behalf of the Parish to protect its monuments. In 1907 Kermode published “Manx Crosses”; this remains one of the most important publications on Manx archaeology.

Other crosses on the island have for the most part been retained within their parochial boundaries - many within Parish Churches. Some remain in isolated and exposed locations while a proportion have been accessioned by the Manx Museum. One other Cross House at Lonan, also constructed with assistance from the Trust, accommodates a small collection. Both cross houses are within the ownership and management of their respective parishes.

In the last ten years MNH has taken a careful step by step approach to this issue to revisit every aspect of the crosses. The approach has been evidence-based and transparent, involving key stakeholders, and making information publicly available. New technologies such as 3D laser scanning have been used and as much information as possible shared freely online. It has been a major undertaking.

## MNH has:

- Commissioned and completed a Desk Based Assessment of all available information on the crosses to establish a baseline for our collective knowledge and understanding – much of which has been made publicly available through the iMuseum.
- Completed and published a Statement of Significance, which evaluates, characterises and quantifies the significance of the crosses (in accordance with established international protocols) to the Isle of Man and their relative significance internationally. This has been discussed with local stakeholders.
- Conducted a detailed risk assessment, by site, of all the crosses on the island in order to prioritise and characterise the risks. This was followed by a detailed physical assessment of condition of each cross.
- Commissioned and completed a Statement of Significance of the Armitage Rigby Maughold Cross Shelter
- Funded an Options Appraisal for a replacement Cross House at Maughold. MNH worked with the PCC to develop a brief for appraisal and to facilitate the process which was managed by the PCC.
- Funded and supported the publication of Manx Crosses: A Handbook of Stone Sculpture by Sir David Wilson, published in 2018.
- Supported the research and preparation of the definitive catalogue of runic inscriptions on the Manx Crosses, by an international academic team led by Professor Michael Barnes, The Runic Inscriptions of the Isle of Man published in 2019 by the Viking Society for Northern Research.
- Commissioned a 3D digital survey of all the Crosses by Lancaster University to provide baseline information for future condition monitoring. Digital models have also been made publically accessible online.

## Maughold Cross House

The Statement of Significance for the Manx Crosses concluded that the crosses together are internationally important.

In broad terms the Statement of Significance of the Cross House concluded that while the crosses were pre-eminent internationally the cross house represented some local community significance owing to its association with a known Manx Arts and Crafts architect, and with the efforts of P.M.C. Kermode to document and preserve the crosses, although not for its architectural qualities. The Statement suggested that there was value and reason in retaining the existing cross house and separately accommodating the cross collection in a new building in another location.

MNH Trustees therefore agreed to fund a feasibility study for a replacement Cross House at Maughold. MNH staff worked with the Parochial Church Council (PCC) to develop a brief for the study which was managed by the PCC but funded by MNH.

The completed Feasibility Study identified four potential sites within the village including the burial ground. These were evaluated jointly by MNH officers and representatives of the PCC, and a consensus arrived at for the preferred option.

The site identified is in private ownership. The landowner has been identified and discussions have taken place with regard to the potential for the land to be made available for this development. No concept design has yet been undertaken pending the owner's permission to access the site.

## Community Facilities

It has been suggested that the development of a new cross shelter alone might be a missed opportunity as it would have no other facilities for visitors. The nearby Parish Hall is increasingly unfit for purpose and costly to run. Initial discussions with the PCC suggest that a simple suite of facilities (kitchen, accessible toilet, flexible space) adjoining the cross shelter would provide facilities for visitors and the community. Whilst it would impact the cost it would increase sustainability and opportunities to support tourism and the wider role of the church.

## Next Steps

The complex nature of the project means that it requires a high level of co-ordination and professional knowledge together with the capacity and resources to manage the needs of the crosses along with the requirements and expectations of key stakeholders.

As the only stakeholder with appropriately qualified and experienced professional staff, MNH is happy to take the lead in working with the community to move this project forward. However, MNH can only do this in close collaboration with the Church and community and will only be able to fund a portion of the scheme.

The brief for the feasibility study did not extend to the generation of design options for any of the potential locations.

The next step is to prepare outline design options for the agreed preferred site and negotiate with the relevant landowner to arrive at an in principle agreement to convey the required land. Discussions will also need to commence with the PCC, Diocese and MNH to agree which body (or partnership) ultimately has beneficial ownership and how a new facility may be operated and maintained.

The agreed preferred output from the initial design options could be developed relatively quickly and utilised at a fairly early stage in order to engage in timely consultation with wider stakeholders, including residents of Maughold, Commissioners, learned societies, Diocesan Advisory Committee etc. and would additionally be useful in helping to kick-start a fundraising campaign.

## How urgent is this and how fast are the crosses decaying?

It is impossible to know for sure but there is no evidence to suggest that the rate of decay is rapid. This was the principal reason for documenting the crosses by 3D scanning so that we could monitor their condition scientifically and based on evidence. An initial comparison between new 3D scans of one of the Maughold crosses and a mould taken from it in 1905, showed no discernible losses. Further such studies are planned.

Bird droppings contain harmful chemicals that may promote the decay of some of the stones. The droppings also contain organic matter that encourages the growth of algae, fungi and lichens that can also cause physical and chemical damage over time. The Maughold Crosses are also at risk from damage caused by members of the public taking rubbings, vandalism or even possibly, theft.

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