

The next newspaper reference to The Raggatt came in September 1904 when the public was informed that Mr John G Corrin, JP, had taken up residence in the mansion house recently erected by Mrs Bushe. It commented that the building was most picturesque, situated overlooking Glenfaba.



## THE HOWSTRAKE HOLIDAY CAMP

**Speaker : Peter Kelly**

**Date: Friday 28th April**

It was another full audience at St. Ninian's School for Peter's presentation. He commenced by explaining his connection with the Howstrake Holiday Camp going back to 1965 when, as a 17 year old, he would cycle out to the camp on a Monday night during the summer season to put on the weekly film show. He then took us through the story of the camp from its formation to the end. We have converted Peter's talk into an article with some additional information that has come to light and part one appears elsewhere in this Newsletter.

## THE WORLD'S FIRST HI- DE- HI

The passing of the Howstrake Act in 1892 physically changed the face of part of Onchan and, in the course of just a few years, changed the fortunes of many. The Act granted permission for the reclamation of part of the coastline from Derby Castle to Port Jack and the laying down of a railway track. This ran initially from Derby Castle in Douglas to Groudle, then on to Laxey and finally to Ramsey.

On the coat tails of the Act came the registration of the Douglas Bay Estate Limited on 10th September 1892. The purpose of the company was to develop sections of the Howstrake Farm in Onchan. The agreement with the owners was land would be taken from the farm in tranches. The first 12 acres would cost £500 per acre, the next 12 acres at £400, down to £100 per acre for the remainder.

Also coming into being at this time was the Douglas and Laxey Coast Electric Tramway Company Limited to run the electric railway. At Groudle, Richard Maltby Broadbent rented land from the Douglas Bay Estate Limited but

already owned the land on the other side of the river as it was part of his Bibaloe Farm. He had the Groudle Hotel built which opened in time for the first tram to arrive in September 1893. The Glen proved very popular and each year Broadbent added to its attractions; decorative wheelhouse, sea lions, polar bears, miniature railway, small zoo, dance floor, side shows etc. Even when the electric tram went through to Laxey, thousands of visitors still went to Groudle.

The electric railway line was laid at the expense of the Douglas Bay Estate Company and agreement was reached that in May 1894 the electric railway company would buy the lines, power station etc. – but not the land upon which the lines had been laid. It was also agreed that the Douglas Bay Estate Company would expend a sum not exceeding £2,500 on the creation of a 50 acre ornamental park and pleasure ground on the Howstrake land near to a place called Lag Birragh on the coastline.

It was to have roads, paths, seats, buildings and to be fenced off from the other lands around. When complete it was to be run by the electric railway company and purchased by them at the same time as buying the lines, power station and depot at Derby Castle. By this time the tramway company had changed its name (on 30th April 1894) to the Isle of Man Tramways and Electric Power Company Limited as it was supplying electricity to others en route.

The services of John McLean, a landscape gardener and nurseryman of Kegworth, Derbyshire was employed. He laid out over 3½ miles of gravel paths and planted hundreds of trees. There were large entrance gates with a corrugated iron lodge, a tunnel under the road and railway lines to link the lower part of the park. On the lower section was erected a pavilion of corrugated iron but internally it was decorated by the London firm of Messrs Schoolbred with a Japanese theme. There was the resident string band of Edwin Race and a couple of marquees which were described in an advertisement as being to provide shelter from the heat or rain.



It opened to the public towards the end of June 1895 as 'Howstrake Park' but when it re-opened for the 1896 season it was called 'Douglas Bay Park'. The tram fare to the park was three pence, the same as to the much more popular

Groudle Glen. Admission was a mere two pence but it must have been very much like the Arboretum at St Johns when that opened in 1979. That is it was just a series of saplings planted in a couple of fields. The difference with the park at Howstrake was the site was very exposed and only the pine trees survived.

In June 1896 a new company was formed, 'The Douglas Bay Estate and Groudle Glen Company Limited', which bought Groudle Glen from Broadbent for £25,000. This was far more profitable than the Douglas Bay Park for the electric tram company and the new company took back the park that was intended to rival Groudle. The Douglas Bay Park didn't re-open after the 1896 season.

Coming into the picture was Joseph Cunningham, a baker in Liverpool. He lived with his mother in Great Howard Street running a baker's shop cum post office. He supplied ships with the commercial long tin loaves and had a thriving business. He was concerned about the youth of the area and at his own expense opened a reading room for them in Vauxhall Road. Here he provided books, newspapers, washing bowls, soap and towels. Things would get stolen but he just replaced them as quickly as they went.

He was a principal founder of the Gospel Hall in Commercial Street and was a Sunday School Superintendent. On one occasion, he ran a trip for 500 scholars on the canal to Lydiate. He hired boats used for carrying goods, removed the hatches and stood the children inside. He organised games in a farmer's field and made tea using a water boiler he borrowed. He started Cunningham's



Juvenile Choristers. He helped form the Gordon Institute in Liverpool's North End **The Florence Institute** district. When the Florence Institute (built in 1889) opened in Liverpool, Cunningham was invited to be superintendent, which he accepted.

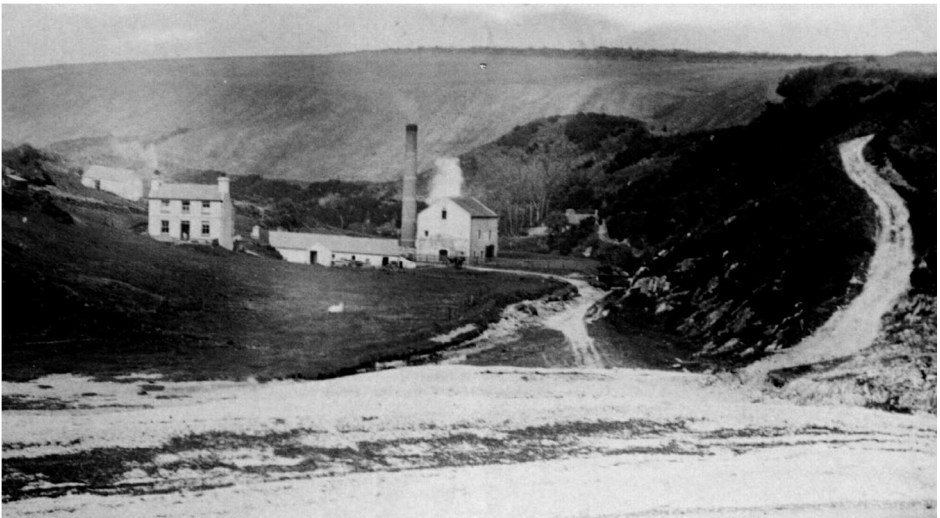
During the summer he took the boys on camping holidays and in 1892 brought them to Laxey. The following year they returned but in 1894 camped at Groudle on land between the reservoir keeper's house and the shore. The camps for 1895, '96 and '97 were at Laxey and were reported on by the local press with particular regard to the concert that the boys always put on for the locals.

In 1897 Cunningham contacted the newspapers and advised that for the past

three years the camps were organised by him and had nothing to do with the Florence Institute. It turns out he and the Institute parted company in 1894 after several disagreements. He was still with them at the time of the Groudle camp 5th-11th August 1894 as correspondence with Douglas Town Commissioners' Water Committee confirms.

Cunningham returned in 1898, but this time in a different guise. He had taken a lease of the empty Howstrake Park or Douglas Bay Park under the name of The Liverpool Camping Club of which Cunningham described himself as the Honorary Secretary. Through a periodical entitled 'The Tourist' he was offering a monthly prize of a week's free camping holiday at the camp. Those wishing details of holidays had to apply to Mr J.Cunningham at 390 Great Howard Street, Liverpool.

This was the birth of the holiday camp as opposed to 'camping', for it was open all summer and all the participants had to bring was a towel. In the past they had to bring knife, fork, plate, cup etc. and they were given food which they had to cook for themselves. Now everything was done for them. It was, like the camping holidays for the Florence Institute, a male only affair. His customers came from temperance leagues, youth clubs, Sunday schools, athletic clubs and the likes.



**Groudle Shore**

During the summer of 1899 the camp was running again, but this time under the title of "Young Men's Summer Holiday Camp". Following the success of the 1898 season he made several improvements to the camp. 'The Electric Light' was laid on in the buildings. Campers could elect to sleep indoors in the pavilion created for Howstrake Park or they could sleep under canvas, but

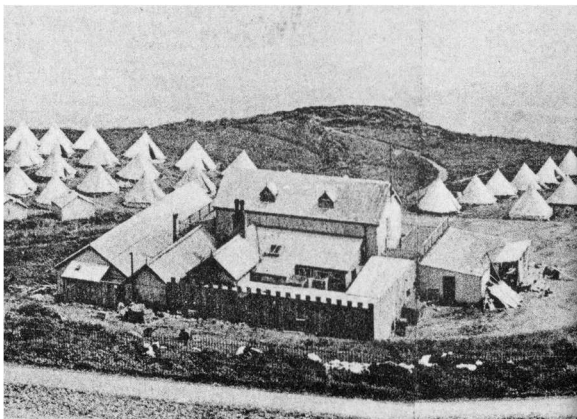
they were all provided with spring beds. The kitchen was in a single storey building behind the pavilion. The dining room was in a marquee and a second marquee was used as the games and entertainment room complete with a piano. Cunningham also provided a dark room for those campers who had a camera to develop their glass plate negatives.

Again through 'The Tourist' he offered a week's free holiday as a prize in a monthly competition. That publication described the camp as "far and away the cheapest holiday that any young man can have, and the camp is a novelty, a pleasure and a success". The local press, on the other hand, obviously didn't appreciate the true set-up on the coast at Howstrake and referred to it as a YMCA camp presided over by Mr Cunningham, a Presbyterian elder, when referring to cricket matches between the camp lads and both the Cronkbourne and Douglas Cricket Clubs.

Success breeds success and the 1900 season saw more young men coming to Howstrake. Cunningham negotiated with the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company and those staying at the camp travelled on the boat in the saloon at fore cabin rates; the fare on the horse trams and electric trams was at half price but the tickets had to be bought through the camp.

A description of the camp in 1901 advised that breakfast was served 8am-9.30am, dinner Noon to 2pm, tea 4pm-6pm and supper 10pm-11.30pm. If you were a YMCA member the fee for the week was fifteen shillings and sixpence. Non-members were seventeen shillings and sixpence.

As was the case when he brought lads to Laxey via the Florence Institute, he put on concerts with the campers in Laxey for the Rechabites, Oddfellows and at the Methodist School Rooms. He also organised walking races for the Young Men's Holiday Camp Athletic Club of which he was president. The races started at the Derby Castle Electric Tram Station and went in a circular route out past The Nunnery and Kewaigue.



**Bungalows on the left**

He presented cups and silver medals and usually had the Mayor of Douglas starting the race. After the races all the competitors and officials were provided with a meal in the newly erected wooden dining room. He had also built three wooden bungalows/chalets as an alternative to tents.

He produced 'The Camp Herald' from the second year of trading. This was a small booklet showing activities at the camp, and these were distributed at the beginning of the season. A newspaper article in July 1902 advised that there were 200 young men in camp that week and the fee was one guinea per week. Approximately 3-4,000 lads camped at Howstrake each year.

In 1903 Douglas Corporation, having taken over the horse trams the previous year, wrote to Cunningham to advise that instead of a 50% reduction on horse tram fares they were going to change the terms to 25%, but only on the purchase of £50 of tickets at a time. Cunningham replied noting the change and advising that in that case he was not going to buy any tickets at all. It is fair to say that there was unrest amongst the Douglas boarding house keepers as to the amount of business that was going to the camp and not to them.

Towards the end of the 1903 season there was a storm one morning and 65 tents were ripped to shreds as well as other damage caused. This prompted Cunningham to look for a more sheltered site and for the 1904 season he operated from a virgin site at Little Switzerland above the promenade at Douglas. It would appear that when he left Howstrake he took down the extra buildings he had erected. Strangely throughout Cunningham's occupation of Howstrake the Onchan Village Commissioners' rates book listed it as Lag-Birragh Park with Douglas Bay Estate Company as owner and occupier until April 1903 when it listed Joseph Cunningham as occupier. In 1904, although he had gone, he still had the tenancy and the park was available to his campers in Douglas for recreation.

In April 1904 there was a huge fire at the Howstrajke Park that lasted for two days, destroying the trees and shrubs on the upper part of the park. It appears from the commissioners' rates book that in 1905 the Howstrake Holiday Camp was back in business. It was listed as being occupied by William Cannon and Frederick Saunderson, the mastermind behind the whole Howstrake development. Whilst Cunningham was advertising his Young Men's Holiday Camp (open March to October) in the Isle of Man Advertising Board yearly holiday guide, The Howstrake Camp wasn't. A picture postcard of the camp was sent out in March 1906 to all who had stayed in 1905 advising that the camp would be open for the 1906 season at Whitsuntide.

In 1907 Tabet Black Carrick, a baker from Liverpool and John Hatton of Stonecroft, Liverpool, took out a lease on the camp from what was by now Howstrake Estate Limited. (The Douglas Bay Estate and Groudle Glen Company Limited having gone into Liquidation).

In 1910 Carrick formed a Limited Company, Howstrake Holiday Camp Limited, to take over the business that he and John Hatton had built up. The first directors were Carrick and John Arthur Irwin, a provisions merchant of 108, Orwell Road, Liverpool and the subscribing shareholders were Tabet

Carrick together with his niece Mary Forbes. The buy-out of Carrick and Hatton was by way of a shares issue. Thus, although Hatton was no longer involved in the running of the camp, he became the holder of 100 shares which he retained until 1924. The first company return was made on 8th June 1910 and this showed there were 12 shareholders at that time.



**Carrick's Howstrake Holiday Camp**

The directors were Tarbet Black Carrick of 9, Carlton Terrace, (part of Royal Avenue) Onchan, John Arthur Irwin of Liverpool and Alexander Nivison, butcher of Main Road, Onchan. Amongst the shareholders were R.G.Shannon the Chartered Accountant and Reginald Hurst Milner, Manager of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Bank of 57, Victoria Street, Douglas. By December William Alfred Caley, baker and Samuel Skillicorn, builder, both of Onchan held 10 shares each.

During 1910 the first new building was erected at the camp; it was a combined dining room and recreation room. Constructed out of a timber frame sheeted with corrugated iron, the plans for the construction were prepared by the firm of Rigby and Heslop (see Newsletter 104).

The following year they deposited plans for a new entrance on King Edward Road as the original corrugated iron lodge and tunnel under the road were no longer available. This was closely followed by an ablutions block then a two storey building that housed an office, lounge, billiard room and five bedrooms at first floor level. In 1913 came another two storey building with a larger billiard room with more bedrooms above. All this time the land was on lease.

Then at the beginning of August 1914 Great Britain declared war on Germany. Holidays came to an abrupt end and hundreds of young men on holiday in the Isle of Man headed back to their home towns.

That year Tarbet Carrick had agreed to pay Douglas Corporation Water Department £450 to extend their four inch water main all the way out to the camp and now with the outbreak of war, what lay before him and the camp? In February 1914 he wrote a 23 page letter to Arthur Irving in which he explained how the camp could expand but only if capital was injected. He gave details of how he felt the camp had advantage over Cunningham's as it had views over the land and sea whereas Cunningham's new camp was on the flat and campers only had a view of the sky above or marshy ground below. He went into great detail of the rates hoteliers in Douglas had to pay to the Corporation but the rates in Onchan were cheaper and tents didn't carry a rateable value. The camp would therefore always offer a cheaper alternative to hotels and boarding houses.

In the same letter he explained that when he and John Hatton took a lease of the camp the rent was fixed at £60 for the first year, £80 the second and £100 the third with an option to purchase at the end of the three years for £2,500. Carrick and Hatton did not get on and at the end of the third year Carrick refused to continue with Hatton, but the Howstrake Company was happy to have Carrick as a tenant if he formed a limited company. He was given a three year lease at £100 per annum. At the end of that period the rent was to be increased by £20 p.a. subject to a down payment of £250 on the land which would be forfeited if the purchase did not go through.

Tarbet Carrick asked Arthur Irving to return the letter when he had read it and studied the content as he wished to pass it to Messrs Nivison, Shannon and Milner for them to consider as well.

The Great War was not over by Christmas 1914 as many were led to believe it would, and in January 1915 Tarbet Carrick wrote a 14 page overview for the future of the camp. He started with an optimistic sentence and that approach continued page after page.

"When the present war is ended in favour of the allies, with whom we are acting, we may look forward to having a long peace and good business for a considerable time afterwards."

He planned to increase the number of young men staying from 450 to 650. He had worked out how to provide an additional dining room and kitchen which should have a concrete floor or perhaps even tiled. He had decided that new buildings should again be timber framed and finished with corrugated iron but the roofs should be red asbestos tiles and not corrugated iron. He went into great detail about cookers, boilers, ovens and all the technical side of such installations.



One hundred more tents would be required along with 36 more tables and all the cutlery, dishes and chairs. An additional toilet block would be needed, and most important was a large shelter for those waiting for the tram; big enough to accommodate 150-200 people at a time. This was to be built of stone as there was plenty of stone on site. The rear elevation facing the sea could have an advertisement for the camp which could be seen by those on the Steam Packet boats. He was also keen to see a large greenhouse erected to provide flowers and tomatoes.

He had other ideas including a one horse stable, cart shed, bungalow for a caretaker couple, a set of hydropathic baths and to build a five foot high stone wall all around the camp. He finished his report with "some parts of the ground should in my opinion always be left in its rough state that I think is one of the charms of Howstrake Holiday Camp."

Carrick kept the company afloat by increasing the share capital in 1911 and in 1914 and so taking in more money. Also mortgages were taken out with director Irwin (£1,250 in June 1913 and £350 in May 1917) and with the Lancashire and Cheshire Bank for £1,500 in June 1915.

In May 1915, when the war was taking hold and no young men were taking a holiday at Howstrake, Tarbet Carrick took up the option and purchased the camp. During the summer it was occupied for three months by the Isle of Man Volunteers under canvas whilst training; they returned in October that year. In August 1917 the Officer Training Corps (OTC) from King William's College camped at Howstrake and were photographed by one of their leaders.

In the Manx Museum are glass plate negatives of Alien Internees at Howstrake Camp, gardening on the slopes in lazy bed fashion. The photographs didn't show any guards present and one is left wondering were any aliens held at Howstrake as there is no official record of this. Alternatively, did they walk to Howstrake each day all the way from the Douglas Alien Internee Camp (Cunningham's) just to garden as there was plenty of land between the two sites that could have been cultivated by them. This was not intense cultivation but gardening for pleasure.

Although the war was not yet at an end, at the beginning of June 1918 Tarbet Carrick took out advertisements in the local press. 'Holidays at Home. Howstrake Camp near Groudle. Open July, August and September. Why not spend a short holiday at this ideal place? Good Bungalow Accommodation for Gentlemen.'

To be continued : 'And when the war was over'