

Defining the island city: ancient right versus modern metropolis, as considered at Peel, Isle of Man

Patricia Adrienne Tutt
Independent researcher
Peel, Isle of Man
patricia.tutt@manx.net

ABSTRACT: This paper explores the term ‘city’ per se, and the right to city status in the British Isles. It addresses the nature of modest insular proto-cities, those on small islands and archipelagos that have no great significance outside their own insular sphere, by looking at Peel on the Isle of Man, which claims city status on the basis of its cathedrals, ancient and modern, ruined and working. Whilst not meeting the current United Kingdom’s criteria for city status, Peel’s claim can be validated on two fronts, ancient right and Manx independence from the Crown, or asserted in confident maintenance of the status quo. The latter embodies the independence and otherness of islands and their cities – and their determined self-belief.

Keywords: cathedral, city status, Crown Dependency, fortified town, island, island studies, Isle of Man, Peel, townscape

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Introduction: the island city

From the perspective of the modestly-sized, strategically unimportant and politically independent island I live on, the concept of an ‘island city’ can seem something of an oxymoron. The terms ‘island’ and ‘city’ conjure diametrically-opposed images in our minds. The one is isolated, constrained, other-worldly, behind-the times; the other is a huge phenomenon, expanding, progressive and plunging into the future. The dichotomy is most evident in terms of scale. The islands under consideration here are small whilst, conventionally, cities are big. So what is an ‘island city’ and how does it differ from our conventional understanding of a city?

When considering ‘island cities’ it seems that they can be apportioned into one or more of three distinct main groups or contexts: the island close to a greater landmass, consumed by a city which is spreading, inexorably, far beyond its original insular limits – and is no longer an ‘island city;’ the constrained culturo-historical city, time-bound and often moribund unless re-imagined in some way; and the modest proto-city, too limited in its outreach to expand, physically or conceptually, far beyond its present boundaries except in servicing its own immediate insular hinterland.

The first group are mostly either historically-significant destinations or city-states adjoining a major land-mass (Manhattan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Lagos) or at some strategic point within the course of a river or in a lake where the island is close to the shore (Montreal, Paris, Strasbourg) and now have a life beyond their mere ‘islandness’ and continue to expand onto and beyond the adjoining mainland littoral, far away from their original constraints. The second group have an illustrious past, but that past is no longer valid and the city has shrunk or

taken on a new life, alien to its inherited tradition but drawing on it in a new way (Valletta, Visby, Venice), most often in a contrived interpretation of heritage for the benefit of tourists. These are often walled cities. The third group (the main concern here) are significant only in their insular or archipelagic context and expand or decline in balance with localised commercial, industrial and population cycles. They are neither globally significant nor regionally important and do not consume the land-mass of their island, unless it is very small. Their claim to city status stems from other, older conceits. Just as islands are something 'other,' so are their cities. Concepts of scale are relative; concepts of importance are local; concepts of cityhood are historical.

The Isle of Man, at 574 km², is bigger than Malta, smaller than Anglesey, a bit more than one-sixth the size of Gotland. It sits at the heart of the British Isles, but is not part of the United Kingdom. Peel, the coastal town I inhabit, is small and 'until very recently' constrained by determinedly unavailable farmland. Yet, it promotes itself as a city; it has the self-conceit to believe it is a city. This paper argues that it has every right to do so.

Cities in the British Isles

So, what is a city? In the United Kingdom (ie England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland), formal city status can only be granted by the monarch by way of a royal charter. The title confers no rights; merely prestige. Henry VIII regularised the tradition c1540 when he issued letters patent to grant six English cathedral towns city status (City of Westminster, 1540; Chester, Gloucester and Peterborough, 1541; Bristol and Oxford, 1542). Thereafter, the practice lapsed. No new dioceses were created (and therefore no new cities) until 1865 when a new diocese was created at Ripon in the West Riding of Yorkshire. From that point there were a series of changes in the selection criteria for new cities and in the process of creating them, beginning with the awarding of city status to Birmingham, a town without a cathedral, in 1889.

In 1907, the UK Home Office established the rule that, to gain city status, a town must have a minimum resident population of 300,000; a 'local metropolitan character' and a good record of local government. This policy was not disseminated, however, and it remained (and remains) general belief that any town with a cathedral was entitled to call itself a city and that the issuing of a charter was simply a decorative formality. It was also widely believed that having a university, a seat of government or, less commonly, a Lord Mayor, also conferred this right.

By 1927, the Home Office had deemed it necessary to issue a memorandum which was published in the press (*Functions of local authorities*. Memorandum from Health Ministry, The Times, 17 June 1927). It stated,

The title of a city which is borne by certain boroughs is a purely titular distinction. It has no connexion with the status of the borough in respect of local government and confers no powers or privileges. At the present time and for several centuries past the title has been obtained only by an express grant from the Sovereign effected by letters patent; but a certain number of cities possess the title by very ancient prescriptive right. There is no necessary connexion between the title of a city and the seat of a bishopric, and the creation of a new see neither constitutes the town concerned a city nor gives it any claim to the grant of letters patent creating it a city.

The apportioning of city status was further affected by the Local Government Act, 1972, which led to the abolition of the then existing local authorities in England and Wales, necessitating the issuing of new letters patent to re-establish cities extinguished by the Act. Subsequent new cities have been established under English or United Kingdom law, none of which is applicable in the Isle of Man. The UK rules within the law are not cast in stone, however. St Asaph (Wales), with a population of a mere 3,400 was granted city status in 2013 as part of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations.

Wikipedia's 2013 listing of cities in the British Isles shows sixty-nine which are designated by letters patent or royal charter. There are fifty-one in England, seven in Scotland, six in Wales and five in Northern Ireland. None of these are on the lesser islands of the British Isles – ie: none on the Channel Islands, Man, Anglesey, Hebrides, Shetland or Orkney. In a column giving the dates of designation, fifteen of the English cities (all ancient cathedral cities) are dated as 'from time immemorial' as is one from Wales, with the remainder dating from 1158 to 2012. Two of the Scottish cities are accepted on the basis of 'ancient usage' and one as similar (Perth) where the designation was lost in 1975 and reinstated in 2012.

The modern head-counting application of the term 'city' has no recognisance of Henry's meaning. Henry's cities were the hearts of a commune based around the cathedral precincts, excluding what in modern times we would call the metropolitan area or conurbation. The City of London, the Ile de la Cité in Paris, Urbino in Italy – were all administrative zones that historically, if not now, contained the cathedral, a public space, an administrative centre and sometimes, but not always, a military presence, plus the housing and other premises of only the more significant citizens and burghers. The public space was dual function – market place, agora or, in Manx terms, the fair field; but also parade and mustering ground for the defenders of the town and its greater region and the place where public declarations were made. Sometimes the term 'city' referred to a citadel, fortress or acropolis, such as those at Edinburgh or Stirling - the defensible space of last resort. The fortified and walled city was both fact and metaphor – expression and realisation of power; marker and means of alienation, suppression or difference. This disassociation between the nature of our ancient cathedral cities, and that of the modern city, where status is determined purely by size, commercial success and importance, forces a rethink in the whole concept of a city and perhaps necessitates the adoption of an alternative term with which to distinguish the two – ancient city, modern metropolis. In this light, Birmingham is a metropolis, not a city.

So, whilst the ancient cities and the early medieval ones had been the lordly and episcopal seats of power, they evolved to serve four roles (Vance, 1977, pp.100-102): the subjugate city (Roman relics or episcopal sees captive within a local polity); the imperial free city, on a par with other polities within a kingdom; the independent city (city states, as in northern Italy); and the colonial city (a means of control and dominance in the geographical expansion of a polity or kingdom). These cities are most evident in mainland Europe, notably France, Germany or Italy, with the late thirteenth century Welsh castles of Edward I offering the nearest British equivalent.

The ancient subjugate cities remaining after the 'Dark Ages' were mere husks of their former selves, with little influence beyond their immediate environs. The first organisation or administrative system to see their value was the medieval church. Large churches within these cities became the focus of tithe collection, and so the church invariably overlooked the market place, so that the produce and goods sold, bartered or traded by farmers and merchants could be overseen, inspected, controlled and seized wherever a portion was due. The church was the

greatest international organisation of the medieval period, with influence over a wide range of traded goods, such as the wool trade in England, as well as being the focus of relic-worship and pilgrimage. Baronial bishops became exceedingly powerful and whilst, in Britain, the influence of Rome was lost after Henry VIII's disestablishment of the Catholic Church and the creation of the Church of England in 1531, the Bishops retained considerable power in the new church.

This close link between the church and trade remained until the early stages of the Industrial Revolution when the emergence and rapid expansion of the industrial city fuelled the flight from the land and the final breakdown of the last relics of feudal forms of land tenure and allegiance. This history was particularly significant, and different, in the Isle of Man.

Feudalism saw the geographical partitioning of the land into baronies and manors gifted by the king to loyal lords and servants, who were mostly of Norman descent. Thus Henry IV made the Isle of Man a lifetime gift, which included the patronage of the Bishopric of Soderensis (the present Sodor and Man), to Sir John Stanley in 1405. This was altered the following year to become a permanent feudatory gift to Sir John, his heirs and assigns, subject to his rendering the feudal fee of homage and two falcons on the accession of all future Kings of England. This status remained until the forced Revestment in the Crown in 1765.

The rise of Manx towns

The Lord of Man had at his disposal two castles, at Peel and Castletown, with Lord's Apartments in each and the Cathedral of St German within the curtain walls of Peel. The Lords Stanley (later elevated in title to Earls of Derby) rarely visited the Island, preferring their Lancashire or Cheshire houses. They relied on administrators, largely drawn from their English retinue, to manage their Manx estate, and usually appointed someone from within this cohort or from their family, to take the role of Bishop. Thus the Lord of Man controlled the insular administration and justice system; the closed economy, including episcopal tithes, and its capacity to render his Manx income; and the defence and submission of the Island and its population, whilst maintaining his private army's readiness to serve the king, via his military establishment based primarily in the two castles. As a non-resident landowner, the Lord had no incentive to invest in buildings or infrastructure. The Island's towns saw little expansion, and the roads and harbours remained limited, poorly maintained and inadequate until after the revestment. What towns there were, were modest villages and hamlets, either at harbours, inland marketplaces or places of gathering for political or revenue collection purposes. This situation did not change until the eighteenth century with the commercial success of Manx maritime enterprises, especially the fishing industry and the 'Running Trade': the Manx euphemism for the extensive smuggling which took place to avoid customs duties. It was the perceived need to suppress the latter that led to the Crown purchase of the Isle of Man in 1765 from the third Duke of Atholl (who had become the Stanley heir, following the extinction of the direct Stanley line in 1736).

Following the Crown purchase, the third Duke maintained his manorial rights together with those accruing from the bishopric. His son, the fourth Duke, raised a claim in the House of Lords for alleged un-rendered revenues and in an attempt to appease him, he was appointed Governor. In this role, he built the Castle Mona in Douglas (architect George Steuart, 1803), in the mistaken belief that the Crown would pay for it. With the exception of the castles and a very rudimentary defensive, civil and maritime infrastructure, this was the only significant building work undertaken on the Isle of Man by any of the Stanley heirs. During the crucial Stanley period (1406-1736), when the character and patterns of Manx vernacular architecture

would have been established and consolidated, there were no grand houses built to provide precedent, example or experience for Manx architects, builders or tradesmen. The Lord's administration, however, included military engineers, surveyors and supervisors attached to the Barracks Office at Castle Rushen, as recorded in the Castle Rushen Papers (held in the Manx Museum). These incomers had access to imported materials and some marketed their skills. Even so, it is remarkable that there are few buildings of note prior to the Georgian period. Notably, the Castle Mona was built in stone shipped in at great cost from the Isle of Arran and constructed under the direction of a Scottish stonemason.

With the Isle of Man's history being so different to that of the rest of Britain, it was inevitable that differences would arise in the pattern of settlement and building. The critical agencies of these differences come from it not having been colonised by Rome; never being seen (after 1346) as being a military or political target of significance, unlike Ireland; not being subject to the clearances that so devastated Scotland; and never being completely subsumed into the United Kingdom, unlike Wales. After the Revestment, it was held at arms' length by a disdainful and miserly Whitehall, which nurtured the innate Manx sense of suspicion and grievance and ensured an ongoing resistance to change that lasted until well into the twentieth century. This epitomises the 'cost and distance' maintained by 'wary, conservative, local political elites' described by Baldacchino (2006a, p.195) in his comparative analysis of cold versus warm island tourism economies.

Manx towns

Size and importance of Manx towns have shifted over time according to fluctuations in directions of greatest threat, best location for facing major shipping routes, establishment of the Lord of Man's focus of power, capacity and safety of harbours, and dominance of particular areas of commercial or industrial development.

The initial factor of importance appears to have been the direction of threat. We tend to forget, today, that until comparatively recently the major traffic lanes in and around the British Isles were the trading and raiding routes running north-south through the Irish Sea and the North Sea. The Isle of Man, with its north-west coast angled to face the northern line of attack through the North Channel separating Ireland and Scotland, met the onslaught of the Vikings and Scottish raiders along this coast, as well as later attacks from the west, from the Vikings based in Ireland. The castle at Peel – stimulus for the development of the town – was built to face these early threats which had largely diminished by the fifteenth century. Nevertheless, the castle contained the cathedral of St German and the Lord of Man maintained a garrison and apartments there, and later in the town, until the eighteenth century, following which the entire site fell into ruin. Removal of the garrison reduced the importance of Peel until the commercial success of the fishing and merchant fleet brought an all-too-brief renewed prosperity. In these diminished circumstances, it is remarkable that Peel was accepted as the location for the new cathedral.

As Peel Castle declined, so Castle Rushen in Castletown gained in importance, and Castletown became the insular capital. More robust and easier to maintain, being built in limestone rather than Peel's soft sandstone, Castle Rushen faces the English and Welsh to the south and east. The earliest surviving parts of the structure are believed to date from some time between 1150 and 1190 (Lewis, Davey, Morris and Philpott, 1992; Macdonald, 1997, 2007; Drury 2012) when the Isle of Man was at the forefront of regional development, especially by the religious houses including the Savignacs who built Rushen Abbey at Ballasalla. Whilst

Castle Rushen is much better documented than Peel Castle, there is ongoing debate as to whether Castle Rushen was built by Olaf I, Godred II or Reginald I (O'Neill, 1951; Drury, 2012, p.5), Drury preferring Reginald (Ragnvaldr). It remained in full use until 1860, when the incoming Lieutenant Governor could not find a suitable official residence in Castletown and relocated to Douglas.

Insular coastal towns subsist through their harbours. When merchant ships were small with modest draught, most of the Island's small harbours could handle the trade whilst also servicing the fishing fleet. Peel had the largest fleet, being well placed for boats heading to the fishing grounds off Kinsale in Ireland. Over two hundred boats were registered in Peel in 1880, all engaged in herring and mackerel fishing, but overfishing soon led to a rapid decline. Whilst Peel remains the main base of the Manx fishing fleet, this is now a modest enterprise, mainly based on scallop fishing and the kippers produced in the smokehouses in the town's fishyard.

The upkeep of the Manx harbours was a constant drain on resources. As the greatest trade was with Liverpool, by far the greatest effort was expended on the closest port at Douglas where the harbour had the capacity and depth to take larger ships. It was this, more than anything, that encouraged that town's expansion; and it was concomitant with this expansion that the larger town drew the Lieutenant Governor and, eventually, the entire administrative apparatus, from the old capital of Castletown with its tiny and treacherous harbour, to the much busier commercial centre of Douglas which, at the 2011 Census, had a population of 27,938, one third of the insular resident population of 84,497 (Economic Affairs Division, Isle of Man Treasury, 2013).

Today, Peel is a small town with two cathedrals (the ruined one containing a bishop's dungeon which was in use from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries), a castle, an historic street pattern and a vernacular core. Only lightly marked by the Victorian tourist boom, Peel declined into its distinctive 'Manxness' as the diminished fishing industry reflected the dwindling catch from the waters of the Irish Sea. Too inward-looking to attract mid-twentieth century whole-scale redevelopment, and facing the wrong way across the Irish Sea, this small town is now being ringed by substantial twenty-first century dormitory housing developments that make no concessions to the persistently vernacular character of most Manx housing. The centre contracts and draws in upon itself; the periphery is nourished from elsewhere. This, the most distinctive urban centre in the Isle of Man, now confronts two very different futures. Residents in the centre want Peel to remain the same, but the political, social and economic imperatives are forcing accelerating change effected by people who live on the periphery and elsewhere. Many of these outsiders fail to grasp the essential nature of the city's *genius loci* – an echo of the heritage/tradition and polite/vernacular dichotomies evident at Visby and Årø and discussed by Ronström (2008) and Grydehøj (2011). What is Peel's future, and would formalisation of city status facilitate conservation of the core?

The development and character of Peel's townscape and architecture

Peel (originally Peeltown – another way of saying 'castletown' – a 'peel' being a castle or keep) is distinctive in being an island town with its most significant origins further downscaled by being on an offshore islet. St Patrick's Isle was effectively the citadel or *città*, the fortified stronghold housing the lord, his administration and garrison and the cathedral, beyond which the everyday life of the town's citizens took place. It was this acropolis that the Papal Bull addressed; it was places such as this that Henry VIII designated as 'cities.' Eventually the Isle stagnated, only seeing change when the causeway linking the islet to the main island was extended to become the backbone to the harbour breakwater and site of the coastguard station.

The ruined structures within the curtain wall now form an iconic and photogenic tourist attraction and archaeological site, nothing more.

With respect to Peel's townscape, the citadel's hinterland, it is essential to recognise the organic way in which the town has developed, as a randomly evolving entity, lacking any rigid pattern.

The awkward logistics of getting to and from the Castle led to the establishment of various administrative offices across the harbour around Crown Street, and streets radiate from here to join with roads heading north, east and south. There was no military castra, or landowner's model village here - just the consolidation of patterns of use as the rural patchwork of farms in the vicinity of the harbour slowly became over-run with narrow, winding cart-tracks.

It is in the nature of old street patterns that they are remarkably persistent – turning the same corners, easing through the same pinch points and meeting at the same places as they did over two hundred years ago. From our conservation-conscious twenty-first century viewpoint, Peel is fortunate in that following the decline of the fishing industry no new significant commercial venture arose to necessitate any notable change in the character or infrastructure of the town other than ongoing improvements to the harbour and outer breakwater. An archaeological study of Peel (Lewis, Davey, Morris and Philpott, 1992) showed that prior to the sixteenth century, the settlement at Peel was very small, but the evolution of the street pattern was not studied, and the dating of individual streets is not known. As Peel remained immune to most post-War development, the old street pattern and the mostly vernacular architecture lining these streets was not brutalised or lost by the whole-scale redevelopment that changed other Island towns. The roads still weave around ancient farms and manorial landholdings before funnelling towards the harbour and the spit. Those old roads and lanes which address the open bay kink before arrival, affording defence against the wind. It was not until the late nineteenth century that a new road (Walpole Road) plunged in a straight engineered line towards the open bay.

Gordon Cullen, the celebrated and influential planning consultant and artist, who took the term 'townscape' and made it understandable through the pages of the *Architectural Review* throughout the 'fifties, visited the Isle of Man in 1971 and produced outline proposals for Peel, Castletown and Ramsey for the Local Government Board (the then Manx planning authority).

Cullen (1971b, p. 11) saw Peel as an interaction between three characteristic elements – public and civic space, narrow and secretive lanes, and concealed centres – and noting how these characteristics contributed a great deal to the dense, enveloping atmosphere, wished to intensify this by marking transitions and emphasising pinch points. He wrote (*ibid*, p. 2):

Peel is obscure. ... It is more like a collective animal than a town, the warren of streets like internal organs emerging from time to time at one orifice or another with a view of sea, castle or shops only to turn away again. One can only think this was a Celtic village whose form became fixed in stone instead of being demolished. The amazing thing is that ... this pattern seems to work and certainly coincides with a strong sense of interior life. What it lacks is any visual style to match this intense Peel-ness. Only Charles Street, with its strange combination of brown stone and red paint, manages to translate the character into three dimensions: an overpowering effect too, not so much an outdoor room as an outdoor cupboard. But not claustrophobic: whisk, or be whisked, round the corner - and there is the sea.

Cullen found that Peel lacked a visual style. Maybe so, but it has a distinctive 'look.' As the only place on the island where soft sandstone was used for construction, it became the only place where render was essential for protecting the poorer cottages from the ingress of damp, and the only place where strong colours were used (perhaps a trade-off from the town's shipyards, as the colour was often red lead, or Falun red). The traditional Manx herring fishing grounds off Kinsale, where the once large Peel fishing fleet spent the summer, can be taken as the model for the town's colourful rendered walls. Elsewhere on the Island, more durable stone reduced the necessity for render, although it is now common.

Ian Nairn, a fellow campaigning journalist from the *Architectural Review*, wrote in Cullen's report on Castletown (1967a, p.3), comparing the two towns:

... [Castletown] needs single actions which would symbolise 'man's' faith in it, unlike Peel, where you feel there is enough suppressed internal energy to bury us all.

In the forty-three years since the Cullen report, Peel needed the industries and commerce that would have generated the means to revitalise it but which, without protection of Conservation Area status, would have created the wealth to pay for much insensitive modernisation that would have destroyed its' earthy character. An attempt to create a Conservation Area in the 'nineties ran adrift as the political agenda moved on (Tutt, 1994).

Until recently, the changes that have been wrought in Peel have been invidious rather than dramatic – a bigger window here, a cruder street sign there – the steady drip of eroding water on a stone rather than the violent change wrought by the quarryman. Charles Street, a short, tight, curving street of sea captains' and harbour pilots' terraced cottages has lost most of its distinctive and aggressive brown, red and black colour but the fabric remains, refurbished in a sophisticated scheme that won a Civic Trust Award in 1995. Whilst there had been some inappropriate development prior to the 'seventies, such as the small block of deck-access flats in Market Street, which sterilise the street by turning their backs to it (there are no front doors to the street), little has been done since in the older parts of Peel that cannot be undone. Today, the knowledge and means exist to improve the quality without destroying that character. That little evidence of this expertise can be seen in the whittling away of the fine grain, and in the construction of large housing developments on the periphery of the town, is proof that vigilance and care are going to be needed to retain the integrity of the inner core, if not the whole.

The main recommendations made by Cullen arose from the belief that the boundaries of the centre of Peel were inadequately defined. He appears to have been comparing Peel with a confined Adriatic walled city. Whilst Dubrovnik (not an island city) may have been his main comparator, there are plenty of other fortified cities on the Adriatic Islands – Korcula and Sveti Stefan being amongst the best known. Elsewhere, Visby in Gotland gained immediate commercial and public success from the re-branding and 'heritagization' (an ugly term) of the walled town (Ronström, 2008). Despite the differences in style, materials and quality of architecture the comparison is noteworthy. These other island cities were fortified, enclosed by high walls that kept out many of the influences and developments of the twentieth century. Herein lies the conundrum: walled cities die or expand by growing up elsewhere. Citizens and commercial life relocate; intra-mural population declines. Too often, the refurbished old city survives as a museum and tourist attraction but has died as a living entity long before its defences have been breached by modern commercial weaponry. Peel, in contrast, despite the clarity of its containment until recently by sea, farms, river and hill, seeps out from the ancient

centre into its later phases of development and so is amorphous, poorly defined and penetrated by too many vehicles - but it survives as a place where people live - and want to live. The merits of Peel lie not in a large population, or commercial or industrial expansion, but in the appeal of its townscape and history and in its modest vigour. It is still a community, and this is rare. Once old purposes decline, most small coastal towns struggle to survive.

Manx right to city status

Peel does not have chartered city status; but its Town Commissioners claim to be seeking such under the UK convention. As Peel does not meet the current UK criteria, and does not need to, this seems ill-informed and potentially unwise: an exercise in turning imaginary obstacles into real ones.

The town had a population at the 2011 Census of a mere 5,093, just six percent of the Island's population, two thousand more than the historic capital of Castletown and less than a fifth of the population of Douglas, the Island's present capital (Economic Affairs Division, IoM Treasury, 2013). Why would such a small town proclaim itself a city and seek to validate this claim: misconception, presumption, delusion, fantasy or hubris? All these things, but most essentially, the town makes this claim as an ancient right on the basis of its first cathedral and there is no impediment or authority in Manx law to gainsay this.

The ruined cathedral on St Patrick's Isle is crucial to Peel's self-belief. The curtain wall of Peel Castle encloses a former monastic site, widely believed (but not proven) to have been established by St Patrick or one of his disciples on St Patrick's Isle at the mouth of the River Neb. This is one of several islets and skerries around the Isle of Man, but by virtue of its location and geomorphology was the best suited for its historic usage. It is now linked to Peel Hill, across the river from the town, by a causeway constructed in the 1730s at the instigation of local merchant George Moore to protect access to the inner harbour from westerly storms, and to facilitate the 'Running Trade' in which he was arguably the most successful of the Island's ship-owners. Prior to this, the islet was only accessible with some difficulty at low tide or by boat, making it an excellent defensible zone when under attack, but difficult to reach to attend services in the cathedral. Today, a road bridge links town and hill at the head of the harbour, and the lower town and the causeway are linked by a swing pedestrian bridge and gate-flap that separate the marina in the inner harbour from the breakwater and outer harbour.

The town continues the claim to city status on the basis of the present cathedral – a church which was designated as the cathedral of the Diocese of Sodor and Man by Act of Tynwald in 1980. There was a long gap, however, of nearly two hundred years between Cooke, in 1802, remarking that the cathedral on St Patrick's Isle was largely unroofed and declaring that "... it would not be safe for a congregation to assemble in it..." and the grudging elevation of the unexceptional church in the upper town to diocesan cathedral. During this hiatus, the Bishop of Sodor and Man, who was the last surviving Baronial Bishop in the British Isles, designated his private chapel at Bishops court, near Kirk Michael, as the pro-cathedral. (This baronial seat of the Bishop was sold off in 1974. The chapel of St Nicholas remains.) Whilst the Isle of Man, and Peel, were without a true cathedral, Whitehall's attitudes to city status changed, and the citizens of Peel and its Town Commissioners do not appear to have been alert to the change – an ignorance that may yet prove to be to the town's advantage, as any claim for city status under English terms may well have been rejected. They felt no need to restate and pursue their claim, despite their constant references in tourist and other literature to Peel as a 'city' and so it became an established conceit, irrespective of any supporting authority or documentation. This widespread, confusing and Janus-faced Manx elision between

the apparent need to conform with English or United Kingdom concepts and statutes and the often belligerent assertion of independence and difference often confounds Manx political life.

From the nineteenth century onwards, the title appears as a ‘given.’ The Peel City Guardian was established in 1882, halfway through this episcopal absence in the town and there was a Peel City Building Company Limited. There were casual references to the “city of Peel” in the Manx Quarterly (1907) and by Cowley (1936), and to “the ancient city of Peel” (Cowley, *ibid*; Kneale, 1897; Porter, 1889). In 1900, it was referred to as “the city of gorgeous sunsets” (Mercantile Reviewing Co. Ltd, 1900) and later, a guide (The Official Board of Advertising, 1923) referred to “the delightful old city of Peel” whilst “sunset city” continues as the most common of the attributions. Today, there is a “City Butchers.”

Much earlier, however, the Vatican referred to Peel as a city. A Papal Bull sent to Peel in 1253 addressed the People of the “Sodor Cathedral City and Sodor Diocese” and the same term “Sodor Cathedral City” was used again by the Vatican in 1349 (Vatican documents; also McDonald, 1997, pp. 208-209 and fn 25), using the Latin ‘*Sodorensis*.’ ‘*Sodor*’ and ‘*Man*’ had become synonymous by the late sixteenth century, but by the seventeenth century the terminology seems to have become confused with Man being distinguished separately in the commonly applied title ‘Sodor and Man.’

The longevity and persistence of the claim are compelling, but if this were an English town making a new claim to citydom, it would ordinarily be hopeless in view of the current criteria. Only exceptional circumstances, as applied during the Queen’s Jubilee, could offer any hope. The Isle of Man is not part of the United Kingdom, however, and may therefore ignore the UK rules. Today, as a largely autonomous Crown Dependency, the Island only comes under UK jurisdiction for defence and for most aspects of customs and excise (EU, Act of Accession, 1972); it also adheres to a common agreement for value added tax (VAT). If the Manx had not been so detrimentally successful at the ‘Running Trade,’ the Isle of Man might arguably have remained as a feudal duchy at the heart of the British Isles until the present day. The Stanleys were legally and constitutionally the kings of Man, but found it politic to dispense with the regal title and were styled ‘Lord of Man.’ These regalities were purchased by the English Crown and today, on the Isle of Man, Queen Elizabeth II is known as ‘the Queen, Lord of Man.’ Arguably, Tynwald, the Manx parliament, could pass legislation establishing the Insular right to determine city status. The President of Tynwald (The Hon Clare Christian, personal communication, 2014) however, does not anticipate tabling such a debate any time soon, should it be proposed. Failing this, the Town Commissioners could petition Her Majesty for her approval directly, as Lord of Man.

The only justification for either high risk strategy would be the reward of the whole paraphernalia of creating or confirming the city (new regalia, a royal visit, ceremonial pomp) and the ensuing revenue- and profile-raising potential for the town, the cathedral and the Island.

Conclusion

This, then, is the town that believes itself to be a city; and which has arguably been known as such since the thirteenth century. It has a cathedral. It has character. It has the courage of its convictions. Why shouldn't it have the self-confidence to proclaim itself as such?

Do the character and appearance of the town reinforce this claim? Yes and no; but, as with many small islands, there are other factors at play that differentiate island towns from mainland ones and which distinguish insular concepts of cities. In the case of the Atlantic islands of the British coastline, these have to do with location and assets (nearly always politically, strategically and commercially insignificant); demand (or lack of it) for significant building and infrastructure works; scale (both of population, and commercial enterprise); and limitations in terms of building resources (both in materials and skills). There is also a tenacious adherence to tradition that is more robust than in mainland coastal towns with expansive and distracting hinterlands.

The Isle of Man no longer commands, intersects or interrupts major shipping routes. Ships sail by; planes fly overhead. The Stanley Lords didn't build and the Crown didn't invest. The fish are gone and the mines are no longer viable. Imaginative luring of new industries with taxation advantages and flattery, although moderately successful, has had only modest impact, offset by the high cost of laying bait. Only offshore banking and finance have had major success, but it is a fragile success that is vulnerable to suspicion and attack from other, more powerful jurisdictions. It was only when outward trade from the mines became substantial that inward trade brought reliable building materials accessible to the common man (Bawden, Garrad, Qualtrough, and Scatchard, 1972). And it was only when the shipping became reliable that general trade expanded and inward migration grew. Without this, the towns could not have grown. In this context, concepts of scale shrink.

Peel is not commercially important. No major industry replaced the herring. It has no hotel: only a few boarding houses. Tourism is mostly confined to day visitors, drawn to the castle or the beach. The magnetism expressed by Manx residents and visitors alike is due to the scenic beauty of the castle overlooking the beach, the activity in the inner harbour, the compulsive daily gathering of line-fishermen and sedentary watchers on the breakwater, and the quirkiness of the old streets. The town only truly comes alive on those special occasions at which the Town's Commissioners excel (Carnival Day, the Viking Longboat Races, Fireworks Night, the New Year's Day Swim and Peel Day during the TT – the annual Tourist Trophy motorcycle races) and even then the character of these events is parochial and the influx is concentrated on the promenade and the beach. There is little overspill into the inner town. The issue here is celebration of community and honouring of ancient privilege and lingering scenic amenity, not current commercial worth. Above all, it is in expressing identity through the geography and other-worldliness of 'islandness' (Williams, 2012).

Islands need unconventional strategies to thrive. Baldacchino (2006b, p.102) observes that whilst historically, islands have been seen as potential locations for fortress or plantation economics, today, they may need to become “political innovators of the information age,” defined by their “ability to source and obtain income, transfers and rents.” Arguably, the Isle of Man served as both fortress and plantation for the Stanley Lords of Man, and now is defined by the ability of its fiercely-defended independent administration to bring lucrative and innovative industries to its shores (notably off-shore banking, on-line gaming, and shipping registers) as well as individuals of high net worth, who add entrepreneurial human resources and capital to this evolving economy. This willingness to pursue the unconventional has the potential to work in Peel’s favour. Though it appears that there is, at present, no mechanism under Manx law to convey city status on a Manx town, this should not deter Peel. There are three options: pursue enabling Manx legislation, appeal direct to the Lord of Man, or just upgrade the self-belief, without seeking confirmation. Both the former are feasible, although success is improbable. The latter is what works; cityhood is a state of mind, abstraction rather than concretion. The Manx legislature and government have a long history of disinterest in Peel, which needs to plot its own course. It has believed itself a city for too long to start investigating its own fragility. Even hubris has its merits.

This investigation has not been about ‘the island as city’ but ‘cities on islands.’ It has not been about the ‘city as metropolis’ but the ‘city as cathedral precinct.’ It has not been about cities as facts, but cities as ideas. What a big transition this little four letter word has achieved, as it has travelled from 1540 to 2014, to join so many others in the basket of language abuses.

On the map of your empire, O Great Khan, there must be room both for the big, stone Fedora and for the little Fedoras in glass globes. Not because they are all equally real, but because all are only assumptions. The one contains what is accepted as necessary when it is not yet so; the others, what is imagined as possible and, a moment later, is possible no longer (Calvino, 1972, pp.32-33).

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