

= Old House of Keys =

The Old House of Keys (Manx : Shenn @-@ thie y Chiare as Feed) is the former meeting place of the House of Keys , the lower house of Tynwald , the Isle of Man 's parliament . It is located across the street from Castle Rushen in Castletown , the former capital of the Isle of Man , in the south of the island . The building was used as the House of Keys from 1821 until 1874 , when the parliament was moved to Douglas .

Prior to 1821 , the House of Keys had no official home , but met first at Castle Rushen , and later at the Bishop of Sodor and Man 's library in Castletown . After criticism from a Royal Commission , plans were drawn up for a new meeting house for the Keys in 1813 , but after concerns about the cost , they were redrawn and approved in 1819 . The building , designed by Thomas Brine , was completed in 1821 . It housed the House of Keys until 1874 , when the Keys followed the other primary functions of the island and moved to Douglas . After their move , the Old House became a branch of Dumbell 's Bank , and later Parr 's Bank . In 2000 , Manx National Heritage acquired the building and began restoring the house to how it appeared in 1866 . The building opened to the public as a museum in November 2001 .

= = Background = =

The parliament of the Isle of Man ? Tynwald ? is the oldest currently running parliament in the world . The first recorded meeting of Tynwald was in 979 , but could date back as far as the 8th century . Originally a 32 @-@ member Tynwald ruled over the Kingdom of the Isles , with half of its representatives coming from the Isle of Man . In the 12th century , this dropped to a 24 @-@ member Tynwald when the Isle of Mull and Islay were lost to Argyll . By the 16th century , Tynwald consisted of an upper and lower house ; the lower house being known as the 24 Keys . At this time , the members met irregularly at Castle Rushen , when called upon by either the Lord of Mann or one of his Deemsters to help with legal and taxation issues . The Keys continued to meet at Castle Rushen until 1710 , when they moved to Thomas Wilson 's (the Bishop of Sodor and Man) library in Castletown . Late in the 18th century they still met in the library , of which a Royal Commission reported that " ... the Keys assemble in a mean decayed building little more than sufficient to contain the number which they consist . "

= = History = =

= = = Construction = = =

Over twenty years after the Royal Commission 's damning report on the state of the library in which the Keys met , the Governor of the Isle of Man , John Murray , 4th Duke of Atholl , instructed Thomas Brine , the Clerk of Works for public buildings to cost and draw plans for a new House of Keys . These plans were rejected by the British Home Department and Treasury as too expensive , and despite repeated demands for a new meeting place , the proposal was put on hold . Brine carried out a survey of the library in 1817 at the request of the Keys , and condemned the building , resulting in the meetings of the Keys being held in a public house , the George Inn . Despite the comfort afforded by the building , it was criticised as being " ... highly improper for any Court of Justice and particularly so , for one of such importance in this Island as the House of Keys " as recorded in the Journal of the Keys in October 1817 .

Another design was requested of Brine , but this time for a smaller and less expensive building . In 1818 , the Keys purchased the building in which they had formerly met , moving the library to the Grammar School . The new plans were agreed upon by all concerned , but there continued to be disagreements between the British Treasury department and the Keys over how to fund the project . The Treasury believed that the cost should be covered by Manx taxes , but the Keys argued that this tax would be excessive . The two parties eventually agreed to pay some of the £ 1039 @-@ 10

@-@ 0d cost each , and the project was approved on 31 May 1819 , just under 30 years after the first discussions . The building was completed in less than two years , and the Keys started using the building in January 1821 .

= = = Operation = = =

Within a year of its completion , the House of Keys was heavily criticised in a letter to the Rising Sun newspaper . The external appearance of the building was described as bland and " more like that of a small country villa , or village jail , than a Senate House . " The interior was similarly lambasted , with particular attention being paid to the small space provided for the Speaker 's chair . During the Keys ' time in the building , they underwent one of their most significant changes . Until 1866 , the Keys were a self @-@ elected body , but following pressure from the public , most notably Isle of Man Times editor James Brown , the House agreed to be elected by popular vote . During the 1860s , Douglas became more prominent ; the Lieutenant Governor moved his residence there in 1861 , the Law Courts moved the following year , and by 1869 the town had replaced Castletown as the capital of the island . The House of Keys building in Castletown was described as too small , and " dilapidated with the wallpaper hanging off the wall . " In 1874 , the House of Keys moved to the Court House in Douglas , and five years later , into their current home , the Old Bank of Mona building also in Douglas .

= = = Later use = = =

After being vacated by the Keys , the building was purchased by Dumbell 's Bank . Not long after acquiring the building , the bank removed the ceiling from the chamber , and added a large skylight to create a grand banking hall . The building was repainted in an expensive shade of blue which was fashionable at the time . In 1900 , when Dumbell 's Bank collapsed , the building was taken over by Parr 's Bank . The render was stripped off the outside of the building sometime during the 1910s or 1920s , revealing the limestone underneath . In 1918 , the bank became part of Westminster Bank . In the 1960s , the upper floor of the chamber was replaced . The building was presented to the Castletown Commissioners in 1973 by the National Westminster Bank on the condition that it serve the town . It was used as the Town Hall until the opening of the Town Hall and Civic Centre in 1989 , and then as the Castletown Rural Library .

Manx National Heritage undertook the renovation of the building in 2000 and now run it as a museum . The building has been restored to its appearance in 1866 . That year was chosen as it was when the " House of Keys Election Bill " was passed , making the House of Keys a popularly elected body . In the absence of images depicting the interior , written descriptions were used , in conjunction with inventories .