

“A SUMMER’S MONTHS RESIDENCE IN BALLAUGH”

(1848) *



[4d] Having been recommended to make a short visit to the Northern part of this Island, for the recovery of my health, I chose Ballaugh as a place most suitable for that purpose, I accordingly set out, and arrived there well pleased with my ride across the Island and the place recommended which was near the shore.

I took the earliest opportunity of going to see the Curraghs, in which the farmers were then employed taking up the turf or peat, for fuel. They first take off the soil, and then cut the turf in squares, that it may be dired and handled the more readily. While at the Curraghs I saw a number of large tress off which the turf had not been wholly taken; they were lying in a horizontal position, with their points directed towards the North East; some of them seemed quite charred by fire. The wood is sound, perfectly black, and takes a beautiful polish: it makes very good walking sticks, which resemble ebony in appearance. I was shown a number of long flints graven upon, found under the turf in the Curraghs, which were supposed to have been used in ancient times for skinning animals. It frequently happens, while the people are digging turf, that a spring will break up where they are digging, inundating the pit, and preventing the work being carried on, until a drain has been formed to carry the water off. A number of these springs brought together form the stream called the “Killain,” signifying “dark and full,” which it is supposed once to have been, but it now scarcely sufficient to work a small mill erected upon it. The Curraghs abound in lapwings, snipes, and cranes, but their numbers are rapidly decreasing. Near the shore, on the banks of the Killain, are several large mounds which have been opened, and some found to contain urns, while others were full of bones. They are supposed to have been the bodies buried at a battle between the Manx and some petty chief from the opposite shores, which was fought on the two opposite hills near the spot. The people around tell you an old legend concerning the battle.

St Mary’s, the Parish Church, is situated near the village. It is large and commodious, and has a lofty spire. Besides the Rector, the Rev. T. Howard, the Lord Bishop also preached in the Church every Sunday afternoon, during my stay. The old Church, situated in the north end of the parish, has been superseded by St Mary’s, since the year 1832.

* Originally published as Stephen Miller, “A Summer’s Months Residence in Ballaugh’ (1848),” *Ballaugh Heritage Trust Newsletter* 15 (2017), 28–29.

From that time to 1844, it was in a most dilapidated condition, when the worthy Rector and his daughter took the matter in hand, and with great zeal and perseverance solicited subscriptions for its repair, both from the inhabitants and strangers. By means of subscriptions obtained, a new gable was built, making the Church about one-third less than formerly; a new roof was put on, and the whole interior was renewed and fitted for divine service, which is held in it every Wednesday evening. In this Church is a very ancient font, which is still used; also an antique inscription.

[5a] The above brief description contains the most prominent features in the parish. Besides these, however, there are many things to please the tourist, amongst which must not be forgotten the hospitality of the people. A more desirable spot could not be found for the invalid.

“A Summer’s Months Residence in Ballaugh.” *Manx Sun* 28 June 1848: 4d & 5a.

Whether people nowadays visit the North of the Island for health reasons and Ballaugh in particular is unclear, but one feels not. Nevertheless, the unnamed writer here did so in 1848, and was particularly charmed by his time there. We have here a description of turf cutting in the Curragh, the finding of what is often referred to as *bog-wood*, worked up into walking sticks, and the discovery of flints from the previous Neolithic inhabitants of Ballaugh. His account reminds us of the time when the Curragh was a watery landscape and turf beds were often inundated by water. There is the valuable recounting of a local legend, a number of burial mounds recently opened up being the graves of those who died in a battle between Manx and Irish petty chiefs. Whilst a “brief description” in his own words, nevertheless, one of interest. And, of course, what “must not be forgotten the hospitality of the people.”

STEPHEN MILLER, 2017

